WON BY A WOMAN

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WON BY A WOMAN

[La Maestrina degli Operai]

A Story from Life

BY

EDMONDO DE AMICIS

Author of

The Heart of a Boy.

From the Italian by PROF. G. MANTELLINI

CHICAGO

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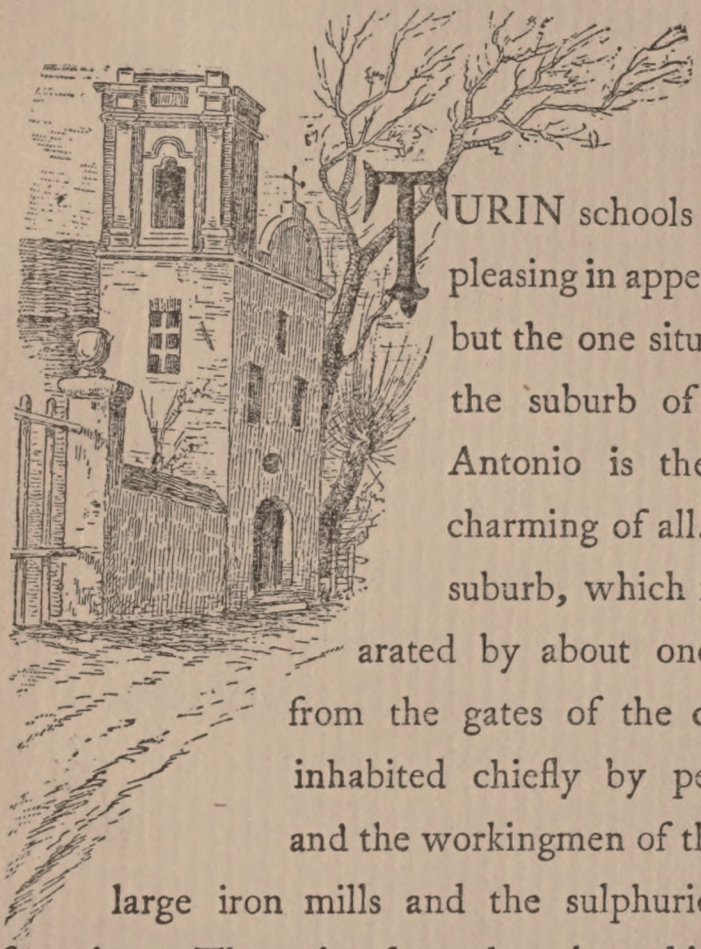
CHAPTER I



TURIN schools are all pleasing in appearance; but the one situated in the suburb of Sant' Antonio is the most charming of all. This suburb, which is separated by about one mile from the gates of the city, is inhabited chiefly by peasants and the workingmen of the two large iron mills and the sulphuric acid factories. The noise from these busy hives of industry disturbs the quiet of the village, and the smoke pouring from their great chimneys

enshrouds it in clouds of dense black. The entire suburb consists of one main street, bordered on either side by queer little houses and gardens; and leading from this street out into the open fields is a broad lane. The school house is at the end of this lane and near it stands a solitary church.

It is a small, attractive building, two stories high; the first floor consists of five large rooms, for the use of the five elementary classes, and of two narrow rooms used by the janitor and his wife. On the second floor are the living apartments, each consisting of a little bedroom and a kitchen. These apartments are occupied only by the four teachers and the principal's family.

Back of the school building, enclosed by a wall, are five garden plots which belong to the teachers. The janitor acts as gardener and receives the vegetables he raises as compensation

for his labor. But the strawberries and flowers are distributed among the occupants of the second floor.

This little colony of teachers, visited only at rare intervals by the superintendent of the schools of Turin, reside here as quietly and independently as they would in any country farmhouse. Only one thing blights the perfect harmony of this rural life—the long cold months of the foggy winter. During this season of the year, solitude and loneliness fill one's soul with longing and depression.

It was on one of those gray, raw, wintry days toward the end of November, that Signorina Enrica Varetti, the young teacher, stood at the window of her little room and gazed gloomily over the roofs of the suburb. The murky smoke belched from the high factory chimneys, floating over the desolate snow-covered plain; and the fog hid from view the far dis-

tant Alps, at the uttermost limits of this level stretch of land. The gloom of the season, the dreariness of the place, augmented Signorina Varetti's sadness of heart. To-night she was to begin the instruction of the evening class of adults—a disagreeable duty which had just been assigned to her by the Board of Directors of the Turin schools.

Enrica Varetti's predecessor, who was the wife of Signor Garollo the principal, had been forced to resign the position on account of a serious trouble with her eyesight. Signorina Varetti would not have felt so uneasy had she been assigned the teaching of the evening class of any other village; but the very thought of the people of Sant' Antonio, with whom she must now associate daily, troubled her seriously.

They were mostly farm hands and peasants whose morals had been vitiated by frequent visits to the neighboring city, whither they went

every Sunday for every low kind of dissipation. Every holiday brought a crowd of rowdies over to Sant' Antonio to spend their day of leisure in gambling and drinking at the various saloons, which had tripled in number since the completion ot the street car line from the city.

Enrica Varetti pondered over these things and she grew heartsick with fear of the working-men from the mills and factories; for she knew how difficult to control their coarse manners and riotous living would make them. The rude ways of the young boys, between the ages of ten and sixteen, made her apprehension still greater; she had often watched them as they came from their work at the factory, and she had shuddered to see them fight and to hear them use vile and blasphemous language. She had been informed, too, that these boys were even more corrupt and vicious than the men.

However, this uneasiness was largely the result of a peculiar disposition and of the secluded life that she had led up to the present time. Signorina Varetti's father,who belonged to an old family of the nobility, was a major in the Italian infantry and had fallen at the battle of Custoza, thus leaving her an orphan. Naturally timid, refined and impressionable she had led a quiet, restrained life in a strict provincial boarding-school, where she remained for her education until her eighteenth birthday.

In early childhood she had once witnessed, from the window of her home, a bloody stabbing affray between two miners, and this had left so strong an impression that she could never overcome her prejudice against common laborers. From that time she fancied that the lower classes lived in constant opposition to social laws and, consequently, she imagined them far more depraved than they are in reality. She believed

also, that the penitentiaries and jails received from this element their largest percentage of inmates.

She would picture in her imagination a vast, dark, subterranean structure frequented by the most degraded and lowest rabble of both sexes; from there she would see streams of blood and wine flow out together, knife blades gleam and flash, and she would see the occupants attack and slay each other and hear them sing the obscene verses of filthy songs.

All this preyed upon her mind, and haunted her like a horrible nightmare from which she was unable to free herself for any length of time. If a person resembling one of this class passed her on the street, a shudder ran through her whole frame. She was frightened by their slang and bad language. If she happened to hear a quarrelsome discussion, she would grow deadly pale and feel her strength desert her, and she

would return home trembling from head to foot; nevertheless, she possessed for these people an ungovernable curiosity and she was forced, against her own will, to watch them whenever she could do so without being noticed. If she chanced to overhear them upon the streets, she would meditate upon their strange words and expressions, for she considered these things the manifestations of their very souls. In newspapers devoted to an account of their actions, she would trace out the important events that marked their lives.

Again and again she tried to overcome this morbid aversion, for she was naturally kind and imbued with religious feelings, and she told herself that such an aversion toward the lower classes was narrow, unchristianlike, and based on ignorance. Social injustice, misery, bad examples and superstition were no doubt the causes which led these people to crime.

When alone, wrapped in silent meditation, she felt herself grow angry at the injustice which society had done these people. After all, she told herself, they were but the results of present social inequalities; and she began to feel a deep love and a keen sympathy for those whom, but a few minutes before, she had looked upon with disgust and fear. She began to love them with a Christian love, and she pictured herself organizing bands of philanthropic women who should devote their lives to the redemption of these unfortunates. Yes, she would devote her existence to this noble work; she would penetrate into their dens and haunts, into the heart of the slums, to make their hard lives more tender and to open the darkness of their homes to mercy and charity.

It seemed to her that she must be successful in such a noble work, and her excited imagination would generally leave her weeping tears of

sympathy; for she deemed herself, as by a miracle, armed with sufficient strength to undertake such a task at the very first opportunity.

But hardly an hour after taking such a resolution, she would pass one of the factories at a time when this ill-kempt noisy flood of humanity was pouring from its doors, and the same old dread would overcome her and she found every attempt at resistance to be in vain.

On Sunday nights gazing out of her window the young teacher could perceive the red lantern and the illuminated doorway of "The Inn of Gallina," which stood at the lower end of the avenue. When hoarse and threatening voices announced the approach of a fight, her fancy would run riot, and picture the brandishing of knives and the falling of a lifeless body across the road. Then she would become weak and faint, and feel cold chills run through her body;

it was often with difficulty that she mustered strength enough to close the window shutters.

Finally, she persuaded herself that she was powerless, that she could not overcome her strong dislike for such depraved people; and she tried to fortify her soul by establishing intimate friendships with the younger pupils of the second class. She feared that many of them would, when grown to a maturer age, become just as depraved and wicked as their elders—those drunken, quarrelsome, ferocious fellows; absorbed in this thought, she would watch them closely and try to discover the germs of those brutal instincts and passions that would sway the actions of their manhood.

Her study proved of no avail. The greater number of her pupils were so apathetic that they would not even brush the flies off their noses and eyes, and so far as penetrating into their hearts was concerned—after a year's hard work

at Sant' Antonio she had not even succeeded in moving one boy to tears. The result of it all was, that her horror for "the other half" remained as terrible and ineradicable as at first.

II

SIGNORINA Varetti was aroused from her deep reverie by a caller whom she did not expect at this late hour. It was the Signora Mazzara, a school mistress, who had just arrived from Turin on the tram-car. Once every month — generally on Thursday afternoons — she made a point of calling on her suburban friend, as she called Enrica. The Signora was a thin, tall woman, all bone and muscle, with a complexion that resembled somewhat the color of ham; and she was the possessor of two beautiful, inquisitive, gray eyes that seemed to fairly scintillate over

her pug nose. There came pouring from her mouth such an inexhaustible stream of words, flowing with such a wonderful rapidity, that one feared she would choke.

After kissing her friend, she gave a detailed account of everything she had done during that day. She had been everywhere. She had arisen at seven and called on a French lady friend, a teacher in the school of the *Sacre Coeur*, to make inquiries concerning another friend who was a teacher at the Facini Institute. She had also taken a trip to the "Oratorio" on Cotto-lengo street, for the purpose of recommending a a child to Don Bosco. Then she had carried the manuscript of another friend to the office of the "Teachers' Union," and attended to some personal affairs at the office of the "Choral Society," of which she was a member. "After all this," concluded she, "I have come to see my friend Enrica."

As she drew closer to her friend, that she might kiss her, Signora Mazzara noticed the expression of sadness on the young girl's countenance. "What is the matter? What has happened?" she asked in surprise.

Signorina Varetti beckoned her to a seat near the window, and then began to tell of her dread of the pupils of the evening school.

"Is that all?" exclaimed her friend quickly, with a smile. "Oh, my poor child! You should rest contented with your lot when you consider that the position pays eighty lires more than you are receiving now. You let your imagination run away with you. I assure you that you will be very well pleased with the work. You must not condemn these people because their habits and manner of living, of which you are still ignorant, do not coincide with your own. On further acquaintance, I know that you will discover a number of good qualities in

them, of which you have no idea as yet. I am somewhat of a socialist myself, as you well know."

And, in fact, she was a socialist—she was a little of everything. A religious woman with those piously inclined, a democrat with those who believed in democracy, an aristocrat with the aristocracy; a great worker for woman's rights, with those who held such ideas; in short, Signora Mazzara had the faculty of adapting herself to all conditions and people. She knew half the inhabitants of Turin; she visited many homes; she dined wherever she taught; she knew members of parliament, priests, officials, journalists, and people in needy circumstances for whom she sought employment. Her boast was that she had friends who were connected with all the highest institutions of learning and that she was on confidential terms with five or six principals of young ladies' seminaries. She

wrote flattering letters to famous people, in order that she might secure their autographs; she attended the funeral services of persons of a high rank, pushing her way even among the relatives of the dead, that she might be taken for an intimate friend of the family. She made a business of introducing people of the literary and educational world to each other. She was always ready to do anyone a favor, and she claimed to know everything and everybody. The only thing she did not make a pretense of knowing was the art of writing, and she seldom, if ever, discussed literature, for which she cared but little. She was born for a life of activity, and had absolutely no ambition to shine in letters. Her aim in life was to become the principal of a municipal school.

However, poor Signorina Varetti did not feel at all reassured by the consolation which her friend poured forth in a continuous flow of words.

She knew but too well, that a mistress of this very school of Sant' Andrea had just undergone a severe experience with the pupils of the evening class. Some of them carried their improper conduct to the extent of drawing obscene pictures on the blackboard, and this had caused such an uproarious merriment in the class that the poor instructor had been obliged to send for her father and have him present during the lessons. Another young lady teacher had found under the inkstand, an indecent letter addressed to her, and she had been almost frightened into a fever by the discovery of a live mouse in one of the drawers of her desk, placed there by a pupil. To cap the climax, the mistress of another suburban school, having reported some of the adult pupils to the authorities for misconduct, was attacked one night by these ruffians at a place where they knew she must pass, and thrown into a ditch.

Signora Mazzara merely shrugged her shoulders after listening to these tales of woe and said: "All these stories are merely the product of a vivid imagination; young school-mistresses turn trifles into tragedies. Believe me," she continued, "workingmen are good fellows, whom you can handle with ease, if you approach them in the right way. Those who abuse them the most, understand them the least. But of the women of the same class—well, that is another matter."

In order to comfort her friend, Signora Mazzara related some of her own experience while teaching at the Sunday-school of Norberto Rosa. "Fancy yourself," she said, "in charge of fifty ill-bred, noisy girls and women of all descriptions, ranging in age from ten to fifty—dressmakers, servants, waitresses, office girls; all as incorrigible and malicious as it is possible to be. They entered the school room boisterously,

pulling and dragging each other; sometimes going so far as to strike each other, in their struggle to gain the seats nearest the windows. They were anxious to get the window seats, you know, in order that they might watch their sweethearts, who lounged about the corners in wait for them. And then, how conceited they were! The older ones would not even let me correct their compositions before the class, and when I reproved them, they would answer me back impertinently. The younger ones laughed and grinned at every attempt I made to improve their ways. One would insist upon devoting all her time to the learning of book-keeping; another cared only about the learning of letter-writing, that she might know how to compose love epistles; another one wished to be dismissed before the class was over, claiming that she was needed in the kitchen; still another one would fall asleep, having spent the previous night in

sewing, or heaven knows at what! Believe me, Enrica, you are fortunate in having a class of men.''

While her friend had been speaking, Signorina Varetti noticed that she was attired in a beautiful, gray woolen dress, which she had never seen on the lady before. She expressed her admiration for the garment, although it fitted indifferently, and asked the price of it. The question seemed to embarrass Signora Mazzara; she blushed and answered quickly: ''Oh, it is only an old gown.'' Despite this declaration, a disagreeable suspicion crossed Enrica Varetti's mind; for she knew that this dress, as well as another that she had seen on her friend, last summer, was the cast-off garment of one of those handsome women who make their fortunes without a marriage certificate, and who had been taking writing lessons from the Signora, in order that she might appear to advantage in the gay world.

Signora Mazzara, resuming her conversation continued: "You ought to see those horrid girls! As soon as the bell rings, they run out helter-skelter and falling over each other; it is a miracle they are not hurt more often. When they reach the street, they chase each other about and throw snowballs like rowdies. Their behavior is simply scandalous, and to make matters worse, a rough crowd of men congregate about the entrance of the school. If what the girls say is true, these men are their brothers or their cousins; so they pair off, each one with a so-called brother or cousin, and they go away arm-in-arm, without much pretense of formality; and this, right before the principal's eyes!

"Among these women there is a servant girl, a regular sneak, who has caused so much trouble that I believe we shall be obliged to turn her out of school. You never saw such an impudent hussy. She, too, like all the others,

has a male cousin. You ought to see what a fine fellow he is! He comes all the distance from this side of Turin to wait for her. He is a tough, a desperado; he would stab a man to the heart at the first word. He makes love to the servant girl, but at the same time he is jealous of the *amours* of the other fellows. He would like to have all the girls to himself. He has already had quarrels with all the men, and they are deadly afraid of him, for he has spent a year in the penitentiary for his part in a stabbing affray. You ought to see his face! Why, his eyes alone are enough to make one shiver. And this shameless woman is proud of this fellow — can you understand it? She lords it over her companions, boasts of the superiority of her conquest, and threatens to have their brothers and lovers stabbed for the slightest offense. Only last Saturday, he and another man came to blows over some trivial dispute, and the police

had to be called to stop them. Some day or other he will get killed. But he is a fine looking fellow, nevertheless. Last year he went to the Turin Arena to take part in a slugging match, and he succeeded in downing everyone who took part in the affair. He is not very tall, but has a fine physique, is strong and quick; and has beautiful black hair, which he combs down on his forehead. When he stands on the street corner during class hours, there are always a dozen girls who want to sit near the windows, and it is impossible to make them pay attention to their lessons and keep order. I can't understand it — such a sweetheart would scare me to death.''

As she passed this last remark, she laughed and her hilarity displeased Enrica, for her friend's words and actions were obviously at variance. Nevertheless, she might have expected as much, for Signora Mazzara was the daughter of a

cooper, himself a pretty bad sort of an individual, and she had been brought up among three rough brothers, who associated with the commonest rabble of Turin and had been jailed several times for disorderly conduct. Signora Mazzara had risen above her family only by dint of hard study and by a kind of instinct that led her to associate with better people; nevertheless, she still retained an undefined sympathy for her early life and associates. Although she did not express herself openly on this subject, her feelings were easily detected by her bursts of spontaneous admiration for the deeds of the lower class.

All this was bound to hurt Signorina Varetti's delicacy of feeling, and, in that one moment, she forgot their firm friendship of three years' standing, and also a great favor which Signora Mazzara had rendered her. She rose from her chair, as if ready to leave the room, for she had

grown impatient at listening to such empty chatter.

"Is it your intention to go out this evening?" asked the Signora. She replied in the affirmative, saying that she intended going to "Benediction," as was her wont every day. On hearing this, Signora Mazzara's bearing changed instantly, and she said, in the pious manner of a devout soul: "You are quite right, my child; I, too, feel the need of going to church once a day, and lifting my thoughts to God. I feel so much the better after it."

Then she informed Enrica that it was high time for her to start on her way back to Turin. She had to visit a lady friend, a relative of a school mistress who had been a governess in the house of Prince Carignano; she had to take a message to the curate of the "Consolato Church," and she had numerous other duties to perform. Then, grasping Signorina Varetti's

chin between her thumb and index finger, she said: "Go to the evening school in good spirits, my child; you will find your class composed of warm-hearted people, rough in appearance, but honest and respectful at bottom. Only be careful not to treat them haughtily, but as if you were one of them; and you will see, then, that they will adore you inside of a month."

Signorina Varetti shook her head, despondently replying that her presentiments were anything but cheerful.

"Stuff and nonsense!" answered the other; "these people, like Satan, are not as black as they are painted." Then she proceeded to advise her friend as to the best method of commencing her work, and suggested that she had better have the janitor present during the first few evenings.

Enrica smiled at the suggestion, for the janitor was a poor old man who pretended to be

very brave, but, in truth, was the very soul of cowardice. He never was to be found when any disturbance arose; it seemed as if he disappeared, like a phantom, through the walls.

"Well," concluded Signora Mazzara, "everything will turn out for the best, I am sure; and I know that you will be fully satisfied after a while."

The young girl escorted her friend as far as the avenue; and all the way the Signora talked more rapidly than ever. She had still gossip galore to retail about ten other friends. At the door of the courtyard they met a young man, pipe in mouth, who wore a soft felt hat. He gazed fixedly at both women, and then stepped aside, in order to let them pass. He then entered the school house, but turned back as he did so, to stare at Signorina Varetti once more.

"It is he!" exclaimed the elder lady hurriedly.

"And who is he?" asked her friend, much disturbed.

"He? He's the young fellow of whom I have just been talking to you; the one who comes every Sunday to wait for that girl, his cousin. I didn't know he lived in Sant' Antonio. Why, you must know him."

Enrica Varetti murmured that she had never noticed him.

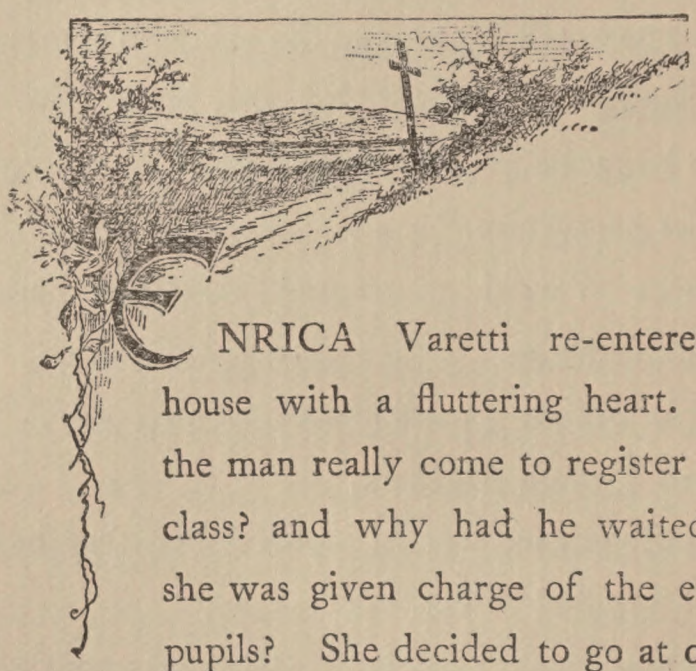
"He will be a pupil in your evening class," remarked Signora Mazzara.

But Signorina Varetti assured her that he had not enrolled as yet.

"Then," said her friend, "he has certainly come to be registered, for he would not have entered the school for anything else."

The young teacher grew deadly pale. Failing to notice her emotion Signora Mazzara kissed her, cried, "Good-by, Enrica!" and hurried away through the snow.

III



ENRICA Varetti re-entered the house with a fluttering heart. Had the man really come to register in her class? and why had he waited until she was given charge of the evening pupils? She decided to go at once to the principal, Signor Garollo, and find out the truth of the matter. She feared, however, if she did this, that he would accuse her of faint-heartedness. Her fears were confirmed a minute later by seeing, from her window, this young man and the principal talking together; the

principal was bidding him good-by with a wave of his hand, his fingers spread apart, as if he were saying, "At eight o'clock." She recognized the fellow at once, for his name was in everybody's mouth. He was called Muroni, nicknamed "Saltafinestra," (window-jumper), because when still a boy, he had jumped out of a high window, in order to escape the wrath of his infuriated father who would have killed him had he been able to catch him. It was a terrific jump and when he arose from the pavement of the street below, he found that he had broken his leg. His father had been a laborer in one of the Sant' Antonio mills and he died from the result of a blow he received from a transmission belt, as he lay in a drunken stupor near the machinery.

For a period of ten years previous to his death, the elder Muroni had subjected his wife and family to a life of misery. His poor wife,

who worked in a tannery, was a devoted church member, and a good Christian. Her son was, by trade, a blacksmith; that is, he worked at it now and then, when the mood came over him. He spent day after day loafing in the low resorts of Turin, and had spent one year in jail for stabbing a man in a fight. He had caused the police no end of trouble, escaping from their grasp no less than ten times, and associating with the worst of the outcasts and toughs that disgraced the city. He was a gambler, a drunkard, an overbearing, ever-quarrelsome fellow, bereft of all sympathy or pity for his poor mother, from whom he would take the very last cent; threatening, if she refused him, to create a scandal in the church, by defacing the sacred images which she had in the house. In fact, when a crime or misdemeanor could not be fastened on anybody else, the police and the

citizens of Sant' Antonio would invariably charge him with being the perpetrator.

Signorina Varetti had always feared the man greatly, and her fear had changed to a positive horror lately; for he had made it a practice to stare at her in an insolent manner whenever he chanced to pass her on the street, and he would turn and gaze until she had moved beyond the range of his sight. He seemed to enjoy the terror and confusion that his insolence caused her to suffer. In truth, a single glance from his black, shining, sinister eyes would cause the young teacher to change color and become breathless with emotion. Why had he come to register in the evening class of the school? This was a question that Enrica Varetti could not answer to her own satisfaction, but it was certainly not out of any ambition to improve his education. The most discomforting apprehensions flitted through her mind,

prompted, no doubt, by the aversion she felt for dealing in any manner with such a man. She feared, too, that she had ill concealed the loathing she entertained for him, and that he was coming to the evening class for the sole purpose of avenging himself mercilessly. Or, on the other hand, he might, pretending friendship and submission, feign a sympathy for her trouble, in order to attempt, in his rude way, the conquest of her heart. Both of these suspicions weighed heavily on the poor girl's mind.

At first, she thought it was nonsensical to worry and cause herself so much uneasiness, before she was sure that it was the man's intention to become a member of her class. But now, knowing to a certainty that he would join it, she felt that she had good reason for suffering so in mind and heart. Good God! how would it all end? What would happen? Tormented by such thoughts, she began to pace the

floor of her room. She paused before a portrait of her father, in military uniform, and she looked up at it, as if to implore advice and to strengthen her courage by gazing on his image. Then she walked over to the mirror and looked on the reflection of herself, as if seeking aid from that, too. She wondered if her manner and bearing would command this burly fellow's respect? Whether sternness or kindness would subdue him? But such thoughts brought neither comfort nor solace.

Enrica Varetti possessed the tall and slender figure of a gentle-born and refined girl; although twenty-four years of age, she did not appear to be more than eighteen. Her complexion was white as milk, and her features as delicate as those of a child; her mouth was small, and her voice weak and feeble, like that of an invalid. What authority could she assume, what dignity could she impart to her functions? Then, too,

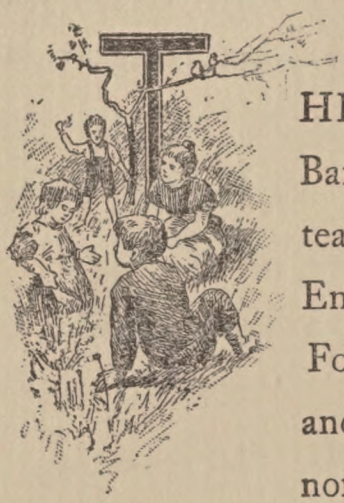
a very slight cast in her blue eyes gave her the appearance of one who lacked in determination and strength of character. This, as well as her queenly grace, her delicate complexion and her dignified bearing, all so vividly incongruous in an every-day public school teacher, would excite the ridicule and satire of those coarse-grained, ill-bred creatures.

She stood before the mirror, her long, white hands carelessly brushing back her chestnut hair, which fell over her temples, and trying to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the attitude she would assume before her class on the next evening, in order to make the most favorable impression. More disheartened than ever, she moved to the window, that she might catch a glimpse of the inn at the end of the avenue. Already, early as it was, she could discern the glare of the red lantern of this terrible hostelry, which so

often had made her tremble, and had filled her mind with such morbid fancies.

Two knocks which she heard on the wall, from another part of the room, aroused her from her reverie.

IV



THE knock came from Signora Baroffi, another school teacher, who was calling Enrica to dinner in her room. For the last month they, and another school teacher, Signorina Latti, had dined together at the frugal table prepared by the janitor's wife. Signorina Varetti, yearning for some distraction, hastened to answer the summons in person. She found her two companions already seated at a small round table, the narrow confines of which were entirely occupied by a soup tureen and a kerosene lamp; the smoke issuing from the lamp commingled with the savory vapor of the soup.

To Enrica's regret, the conversation drifted at once to the subject of the evening school. A few minutes earlier, on her way through the village, Signorina Latti had overheard a young mason say to his companion, with a sly wink: "Well, to-morrow we'll have the new little teacher!" And Signorina Latti joked with her friend at what the mason had said.

Her outburst of merriment was, let it be said, an exception to the rule; for Signorina Latti was afflicted with a chronic melancholy, which was not at all in keeping with her small plump figure and her dark gypsy-like face. She was mortally anxious about her health, believing herself always suffering from some dread disease, the symptoms of which changed fortnightly. Her room, filled with vials and medicines, resembled a drug store in miniature; and her pockets were stuffed with pills and powders. She knew by heart the contents of the book,

"Every One His Own Doctor." She read all the patent medicine advertisements in the newspapers, and kept up an unceasing correspondence with the doctors of the Turin clinics.

Among the numerous other evils from which she suffered was a chronic cough, or rather an imaginary cough, and to cure this she made no end of experiments, trying everything with a desperation equaled only by that of a singer who attempts to recover his lost voice. She was fond of giving her pupils as a subject in letter writing: "Consoling a Sick Friend." Very often she would begin the day's work by saying: "My children, this is perhaps one of the last lessons that your teacher will be able to give you." When walking by the graveyard with one of her friends, she would remark with a sigh: "This is the place where I shall soon be." If one of her mischievous pupils greeted her in the morning with the words: "What is the

matter with you, teacher, you look so pale?" she would become deeply disturbed and anxious, no matter how perfect her health might be. Apart from such faults, she was as good as gold, and far above the petty jealousy and rivalry so common among teachers in the same school; she was like a person who thinks more of the world to come than of the world that is. She was the daughter of a police officer.

Enrica did not attempt any retort to Signorina Latti's joke.

Then Signora Baroffi tried to comfort her. "I envy you," she said, with her thick voice, raising her pale, noble face, encircled by a shock of hair disheveled as an artist's, and speaking as if she would attract the attention of somebody standing behind her. "You will be able to make a thorough study of the proletariat—a fine subject and one which has never been thoroughly investigated. How much good it

will lie in your power to do! How I wish I were in your place; I know I could accomplish so much. Signora Garollo did not understand them; she did not know how to touch their hearts; she has not the gift of persuasion. A clever, sympathetic girl can become their master before the end of the fourth lesson.''

Enrica Varetti shook her head incredulously. ''You hold too closely to your theories,'' retorted she.

And this was indeed true. Despite teacher Baroffi's thirty-eight years, she still believed in the working man of romance — such as he is depicted in novels — who sings the joys of honest poverty, and pities the lot of the rich man, overladen with cares. Imbued with the ideas of such books, she lacked all practical knowledge of life, and from personal observation she learned nothing of men or things; she was familiar with a vast number of stereotyped phrases

and a mass of confused quotations gleaned from such books, which she would piece together, like a mosaic, for her ideal lectures. She was a monomaniac on the subject of lectures; to give them, she had neglected her school work and, on that account, had been relegated from a large town to the suburb of Sant' Antonio. Here she suffered from a kind of literary nostalgia, her soul yearning always for Turin, her lost paradise, where she had found so much joy and pleasure. Her eagerness to lecture was so great that she could not behold a chair or a table, without at once thinking about standing behind it, in the approved attitude. She thought scarcely of anything else; she would lecture to herself in her own room, she would lecture to the trees on the avenue. All that she heard, all that she read, would immediately take the shape of a lecture, just as molten metal takes a certain form from a mould. And in reference to this, it

must be added, that she was a peculiar specimen of the literary kleptomaniac, for by instinct, innocently, she would append her name to the work of another, as the most natural thing in the world. She would take, for instance, somebody's published lecture and make it her own by adding nothing but a kind of lyrical, pedagogical color and an excited dramatic intonation, when she read it aloud; and she would repeat it at every opportunity, gesticulating wildly, like a shipwrecked mariner calling for help. A few years ago, she published a book — an amalgamation of plagiarized matter, on the cover of which she had printed, "All rights reserved." During the period of her exile, she was accumulating a heap of the most tiresome, pirated matter, which she intended to use for some purpose or other, on her return to Turin. Only two things in the world caused her worry; the constant gaining of avoirdupois and the alarming

increase of her gray hair; two obstacles which, according to her ideas, might greatly imperil her future success.

Enrica Varetti's remark hurt her a little. "I am not a theorist," she answered. "I have had more experience than you, and I know the common people better. I have come to the conclusion that we do not know how to teach these people, more particularly the workingmen. The workingman is ingenuous, because he is not educated; he is good because he works; consequently he is easily aroused and made enthusiastic. One must appeal to his patriotic sentiments, to his love of the beautiful and the good; one must awaken in his mind the ideals of youth! And this is exactly what they don't know how to do, but what I would do, my friend."

"Good Lord!" replied the younger lady; "what good would your talk about ideals do, when they insult you to your face?"

"They would not insult me!" replied the other. The discussion, about to become bitter, was interrupted by Signorina Latti, who, devouring her dinner with the appetite of a wolf, suddenly let her fork drop on the floor and exclaimed: "My appetite will certainly prove fatal to me."

Her companions began to laugh.

"By the way," said Signora Baroffi, "Signor Garollo told me that the 'window-jumper' called at his office to be registered."

They all knew him by reputation.

"There is a subject I could cry over like a little child," said the lady lecturer.

"I would like to see you do it," replied Enrica.

"You would like to see me do it, would you?" asked her friend, with a shake of her head. "Sometimes these unbridled demons who scare everybody have hearts soft as a

child's. The thing is that one must know just what words will touch them and the words will do all. Just see how Principal Garollo keeps them in order."

Signor Garollo taught the second class of the evening school; however, the precedent would scarcely hold, for the pupils of this class were all adults. Moreover, Signorina Varetti knew that he did not preserve the order which he boasted was maintained in his classes. He said continually: "My class is so quiet that one can hear the buzzing of a fly during the exercises."

Yet the young lady heard, even in her own room, an infernal noise, every evening.

"There is something else," ventured Signorina Latti, starting to eat anew; "Principal Garollo is a confirmed republican, and therefore it is easier for him to maintain order; these people always side with those who profess republican principles."

Teacher Baroffi contradicted this remark. Garollo, according to her, was a republican in principle and at heart; he kept portraits of Mazzini, Saffi and Mario; his father was a disciple of Mazzini, and the son was faithful to the ideals of the father, as a matter of course. But he never indulged in the preaching of his political ideas within the class room; he abstained only from such cowardly adulation as would please those in authority.

"Indeed, he is a silent republican," observed Enrica, "who takes good care not to compromise himself, and political propaganda does not interfere with his accounts."

Her involuntary play on words made them all laugh. Garollo and his wife were known as the ardent accountants of the school trustees. They compiled infinite calculations on salaries and stipends; they were always busy figuring the educational disbursements, the pension re-

ports, the statements of The Teachers' Protective Savings Bank, evolving suggestions and remarks to be made at the meeting of the Board, registering the dismissals of their colleagues, discussing the budget of the Ministry of Public Instruction, uttering interminable lamentations at any increase in expenditure in any other branch of the State's budget.

They never left their home, and it was whispered that they spent their evenings in calculations and arguments of this nature, only stopping to count, between one figure and another, the cheeses and the sausages presented to them by the relatives of their pupils.

Signorina Latti and Teacher Baroffi laughed at this for some time, and they were just on the point of discussing the fact that the worthy couple knew by heart the amount paid in salaries, indemnities and "extras" to all the teachers from St. Petersburg to California, when

Enrica heard the step of Signor Garollo in the hallway. He stopped in front of the door of her apartment.

She was rising to go and meet him, when she heard him knock at the door of Signora Baroffi, instead of at her own. The Signora ran to open the door for the principal, who carried a large folio in his hand.

His was a peculiar figure: that of a man over forty, small and thickset, with a large head, covered with disheveled, curly hair, a pallid complexion, a stern face, with a thick, short moustache, smoked eye-glasses and a bass voice.

He did not wish to sit down. His wife had sent him to deliver to Signorina Varetti the list of pupils registered for the evening class.

She glanced at the paper; there were forty names on it. She looked at the last one on the list—alas! it was Muroni Saltafinestra's.

The principal then brought forth another paper, smaller than the first one, on which were the names of the pupils who knew how to read; and the names of those who were entirely illiterate. "Let me tell you," he added, "that we have a new applicant."

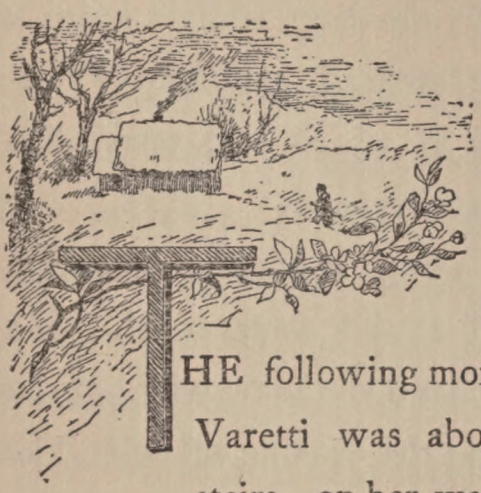
"I know it," answered the schoolmistress.

"Now, don't worry about it," remarked he, with his rough voice, noticing some annoyance in Signorina Varetti's face. "One can easily make him, and all the others, mind. It is not necessary to waste time either in argument, or in sentimental speeches. But one must be firm, frank and perfectly fearless. These people have characters that are strong and open, they never disobey me. I can twist them around my little finger. At any rate, should anything happen, send for me; and when I show myself they will be as still as mice."

Signorina Varetti, smiling ironically, thanked him. Garollo wished them a good-night and started for the door; but he turned around to deliver his colleagues a good piece of news. It seemed that the Minister of Public Instruction had at last come to the conclusion to grant a reduction of railway fares to all teachers in the elementary schools. "It was high time," he said, and left.

Enrica and Signorina Latti bade their friend good-night and returned to their own rooms, the janitor put the iron bar in place over the door of the courtyard; and the house was wrapped in silence, solitary and profound.

V



THE following morning, just as Enrica Varetti was about to descend the stairs, on her way to the children's school, she received an unexpected visitor; it was the mother of the "window-jumper."

The woman entered the room timidly, bowing as if she were in the presence of some great lady. She turned her eyes around in a curious and respectful manner, and she seemed amazed at seeing the portrait of an army officer hanging on the wall. She was a small woman, and wore a yellow handkerchief over her head, which hid

only a part of her gray hair; her attire was plain but clean; her face bore an expression of sorrow that was intensified by the deep, straight wrinkle in the middle of her forehead, and her two restless, sparkling eyes in which two tears, like crystals, seemed eternally fixed.

She began with a singular question, speaking in a low voice, as if at the confessional. She asked the school teacher if she knew why her son had decided to attend the evening school? The query astounded Signorina Varetti. How should she know? The suspicion that the woman might suppose that there existed any understanding, if even in words only, between herself and the "window-jumper," brought the blood to her cheeks.

Then speaking almost in her ear, softly and with a trembling voice, the old woman recommended her son. In case he should conduct himself badly, or be impudent, she begged the kind

Signorina to be as indulgent as she could, and, on account of his temper, not to reprove him too much.

Despite all the misdeeds of the "window-jumper," all his cruelty to his mother, she still believed his moral perversion was due to his evil associates, rather than to his nature. But when she noticed the pitying look on the young woman's face, the truth broke from her, all efforts on her part to restrain it notwithstanding.

"Ah, my dear mistress," she exclaimed, clasping her hands; "if you only knew what a miserable life I lead! That son of mine, for whom I would shed my life-blood! Blessed Virgin Mary! he has not gone to confession or to the Holy Communion since he was thirteen years of age." And with this the poor woman began to cry. Had he only gone to mass on Sundays, she would not have troubled herself about any of his actions. It was on this

account that she had called. Would she not, the kind young mistress, insinuate, in an indirect manner, a few religious teachings, and inspire, little by little, a wholesome fear of God? Ah, if she did this, using her gift of persuasion as only educated people can, an old mother would bless her and pray for her until the end of her life.

She interrupted herself in order to look out on the avenue, through the window; she did this without putting her face against the pane, for she feared lest her son might have seen her enter, and be waiting for her to come out. Her appearance, her every movement, demonstrated an unceasing dread that had grown upon her like a chronic disease, telling a story of sorrow and of suffering, of sleepless nights devoted to waiting for a son, whom she constantly feared might be brought home, wounded or dead. Those sorrow-filled eyes spoke eloquently of persecution and maltreatment from her husband;

of her persistent terror of human and divine justice; of twenty-five years of martyrdom, passed without comfort and without rest.

She turned to recommend her son again; from her humble words there transpired, nevertheless, a certain pride of his fine looks, his courage and even his notoriety. Bad men and wicked women were always wanting his company; they drove him to drink and to gamble; he was very proud and took offense at every trifle, and he feared nothing in the world. Yet, when he was a child, he had been as good as anybody else, and this recollection brought her to tears again. "Who would have thought," she moaned, hiding her face in her hands; "that the babe I carried in my arms would cause me so much pain and suffering?"

When Signorina Varetti spoke a few consoling words, the woman uncovered her face and looked at the school mistress, as if noticing her

sweet voice and kindly bearing for the first time. She glanced at her again from head to foot, saying: "Ah, my poor young lady! how I regret that such a refined woman is compelled to teach those reckless scapegraces." She peered through the window suspiciously again, and finally took her leave.

VI.

FIFTEEN minutes before eight o'clock — the time at which school opened — Enrica Varetti beheld from her window, through the fog and mist, a few dark groups of workingmen. The lights from their cigars and pipes shone in the night like so many fiery eyes. She had donned for that evening a coffee-colored woolen dress, because it was of a hue and make that would attract little or no attention. Ten minutes before the hour, Signor Garollo called, for the purpose of introducing her to the class.

Passing through the hallway they met the janitor, a small old man, with a large nose and a timorous face. Principal Garollo ordered him to keep an eye on Signorina Varetti's class.

"Inside?" he asked in a troubled way.

"Outside," replied the master.

"Inside or outside, it is all the same to me," and the weak old fellow breathed easier.

The young teacher now entered the room with the head of the school; it was the one in which Signora Baroffi taught children in the day time. There were only six or seven pupils seated; the others were filing in slowly, by ones, by twos, by threes, five in a row, their copy-books in their hands. The men stamped on the floor, their feet aching from cold, and the boys added to the noise with their wooden shoes.

Principal Garollo and Signorina Varetti ascending the platform, on which stood a little table, took their stand in front of the blackboard

and under the flaming gas jet. All the pupils cast inquisitive glances at their new teacher; some watched her closely for the full length of a minute, and then passed on to the benches to express their opinion, in whispers, to their neighbors.

They were of all ages, from twelve to fifty, and of every occupation; workingmen from the iron mills and the sulphuric acid factories; tanners, masons; shepherds who came down from the Alps to spend their winter in Turin, here to shelter their herds, to sell milk and cheese, to shovel snow. Their linen was soiled, their coarse jackets were worn over two vests, or over heavy, thick sweaters; their heads were covered with a dishevelled, matted growth, and their beards were long and soiled. The oldest of them seemed ashamed to attend school, and they sought the last benches, leaning their backs

against the wall, which was covered with ink spots up to the ceiling.

As soon as they were all quietly seated, Signor Garollo introduced the young lady in a stentorian voice, modulated to a respectful tone: "I introduce you to your new teacher, Signorina Varetti; and I ask you to be respectful and obedient."

Having said this, he left the room without another word. The new teacher remained motionless for a moment, eyeing her pupils, who looked up in silence. A shrewd observer would have guessed at once that the class was drawing a mental comparison between the new teacher and Signora Garollo, the old one, who was small, fat and over thirty; and he would have concluded that the comparison was in favor of Enrica Varetti. There was a look in their inquisitive eyes that hid a thought difficult to fathom. The school mistress was confused, her

mind clouded, she knew not how to begin; finally, she sat down in front of the table.

At this moment the "window-jumper" entered.

A murmur was heard, and all eyes were turned upon him and the teacher. She grew slightly pale, fearing that they all knew he had come to school on her account.

The young man, with a tranquil, nonchalant air, passed in front of the table, casting a rapid glance at the teacher, moved to the first row of benches at the right, placed his hand on a vacant seat near the wall, vaulted into it with a quick, graceful movement and sat down.

It was the teacher's first duty to briefly examine the newcomers, in order to see whether they belonged in the advanced section (where the "window-jumper" had placed himself of his own accord) or in the primary division; from the expression on the faces of her pupils,

she saw that this examination was expected, but she had not the courage to undertake it. Suddenly she commenced the lesson.

Signor Garollo had instructed Enrica a little about the intellectual capacity of the class, and the best methods to use with them. Following these hints, she commenced to write, with an unsteady hand, a series of simple syllables on the blackboard. It was her intention to have the section at the left of the room read and write these, while she should hear the other section read from the primer.

The lesson began well; for a short time not a sound was heard; those who paid no attention to the reading, seemed absorbed in contemplating the teacher.

Timidly, with stealthy glances, she examined her different pupils: while the first ones were reading, the older ones, and those less advanced, sat at her left. One fellow, in particular, ar-

rested her attention; he had the figure of a dwarfed Hercules; his head was abnormally large, his forehead low, his mouth like that of an ox; his stupid face bespoke brutal obstinacy, but it indicated, nevertheless, despite a troubled expression of the eyes, a certain rectitude of mind. He paid profound attention to her words and to the reading of the others. She noticed that he used a key, with the pen stuck into the wards, for a penholder. When his turn to read came, she inquired his name. He answered in a half unintelligible sort of a way:

"Carlo Maggia."

He was a butcher by trade; he was thirty-five years of age, but he looked much older. He read the syllables in a voice much like that of a mastiff dog, and the boys on the other side of the room commenced to laugh. She turned slowly and looked at them; they became silent.

She was struck by the appearance of a pupil on the right side of the room, evidently the oldest of all. It was one Perotti, a tanner, who had a son of eleven in the same class, seated three seats below him; the son, whose mien was serious and pleasant like the father's, was also employed in the tannery. Glancing down the row, Enrica noticed the blonde head of another workingman, who impressed her most favorably. He was a man of about thirty, his face was refined and he was dressed neatly; the neatest man there, in fact. He had a long aquiline nose and large blue eyes, which shone with an intelligence and pride that became still livelier when he looked one in the face.

The greater number of pupils on the other side were boys: dirty, wide-awake, restless, impertinent faces. At a glance one could have told why they were there—to have fun and to keep warm, rather than to learn. A boy of

fourteen, seated at the end of the second bench, caused her great uneasiness by his familiar, disrespectful smile. He was more perverted in looks than most of the lads she had yet seen in the factories. His eyes reflected a knowledge of sin and vice; by the very shape of his mouth one could tell that he used obscene language. He was yellow of complexion, round-shouldered, long and bony; he leered cynically, like a boy who had served his novitiate in those misdeeds which bring men to the penitentiary and the hospitals.

Then she turned her attention to the boys who were reading the syllables on the blackboard in chorus, singing and spelling like children blowing through a whistle. Meanwhile a strong odor, very offensive to the nostrils, was diffused through the school room; it was the bad odor from recently extinguished pipes and cigar

stumps, from cheap wine, from machine grease, from tanned leather, and from stables.

She noticed that some of the boys among those who read in chorus were shouting at the top of their voices for mere fun, but she feigned not to hear it. When the reading exercise was over, she asked the class to write the syllables in their copy-books, and she turned her head toward another part of the room. Immediately the men, Perotti among them, walked to her table with their copy-books; this they had done when in doubt about the work assigned to them, under the management of Signora Garollo, the former teacher.

The gentle, timid face of the school mistress as she leant over the coarse, dishevelled workingmen, intent upon their copy-books, would have made a beautiful subject for an artist. They were at work on a letter—a task given by Signora Garollo—which a workingman is supposed to write

his old employer, about to retire from business. When they had returned to their seats, Enrica scanned the list and chose a name at haphazard. "Lamagna Luigi may read his composition aloud," she called. The blonde, long-haired laborer arose. They all became perfectly quiet, even the pupils of the other section, all turning to look at Luigi, as if awaiting a sensation. He started to read with an assumed ease and an affected negligence, as if his thoughts were not on his work. There were phrases in his letter which were entirely foreign to the subject, dragged in by the heels, and which clearly demonstrated that his pride was even greater than the teacher had suspected from his looks. She corrected some grammatical errors, to which he took exception in a tone of voice that clearly betrayed his desire to be treated with greater respect than was accorded to the other pupils.

The letter was signed, "*Lamagna Luigi, your equal, not your servant.*" It was a revelation to the school mistress. He must certainly be the socialist of the iron foundry, whom she had heard described so often as an honest, ardent, but most peculiar character, much respected by his fellows, to whom he preached the new socialistic gospel, terminating all his discourses by recommending them to hold in due reverence their position in the social world; for he believed that such an *esprit de corps* was a necessary and fundamental principle for their future emancipation.

The mistress corrected him again, this time about a word used at the end of the letter, and he sat down, murmuring his objections to his neighbor, with a dignified smile.

Thus far, some slight whispering excepted, the class had behaved well, and their teacher gained courage. She asked the pupils to open their reading book, *The Italian Artisan*, which

all the pupils of the section at the right had, and she read a paragraph aloud to them. While reading, it flashed across her mind that she must call upon Muroni to read after she had done, both to break the ice and to remove all suspicion that she stood in dread of him; moreover, by beginning at the right of the nearest bench, his turn would come first. After finishing the paragraph, she made a strong effort, and turning toward him, she said: "Read on, if you please."

All were silent again.

The young man arose, book in hand, smiling with the self-conscious air of one who knows that he is an object of curiosity and expectation.

It was the first time that Enrica Varetti had looked the man straight in the eyes, and she experienced from it a stronger dislike than she had yet felt. The small head with its hair parted like a woman's, in the middle; the livid complexion; the two sharp, glittering eyes, revealing

a hard, resolute character and a relentless, pitiless hater; the small mouth, with its thin lips, looking like a gash made by a knife — all portrayed a ferocious and licentious nature, more abhorrent than that of many a brutal criminal. His physique was as well-proportioned, muscular and agile as that of a mountebank. His pomaded hair, his loosely knotted tie, his tight trousers, his wide, colored cuffs, proclaimed him a type of the "barabba," a mixture of the dandy and the brigand, devoured by a thousand base appetites, held in check by poverty alone, ever in readiness for the most villainous deeds. The bearing of his body, as he leaned sideways with one shoulder higher than the other, the hoarse tones of his voice, everything about the man betrayed an ungovernable and savage conceit, which, not being able to find an outlet, would some day burst forth in a scornful and dangerous hatred for the whole universe.

He read poorly, stumbling purposely, while he raised his face off the book and, from time to time, cast at the teacher a glance that sent a cold chill through her veins. It took all her courage to correct his mistakes, and then she dared not look him in the face; but her sight fastened on his right hand, as she thought, with a shudder, that with that member he had plunged a knife into the heart of a friend. When the "window-jumper" sat down, having finished his reading, she felt as if a load had been lifted from her shoulders.

She guessed from the manner of the boy who read next—the boy who had made upon her such an unfavorable impression—that it was customary for him to provoke the hilarity of the class and to occasion disorder; the air of expectancy on the faces of the others was proof sufficient. Having noticed that his name was Pietro Maggia, she asked, in the hope of gaining his

good will, "if he was related to the other Maggia"—the brutal looking fellow in the other section.

"He is my uncle," replied the lad, cutting a comical face, that aroused the laughter of those near him. The uncle, who sat busily writing with his key, paid no attention to him. The boy started to read again, changing his voice—a trick in which he was quite skillful—and began to imitate the voice of a crippled beggar, a well known character of the suburb. The boys shouted with laughter; but the older pupils showed signs of disapproval, Perotti even called out from his bench in the rear: "Stop that, I say!"

"Why do you treat me with such disrespect?" asked Signorina Varetti, encouraged by the assistance the men had given her.

The boy sat down, twisting his hands over his upper lip, in imitation of a man who twirls his mustache; she passed on to the other pupils.

When Lamagna's turn came, she told him to pronounce his "t's" more distinctly. "It seems to me," he answered with dignity, "that I pronounce them all right." The others behaved very well. Presently she assigned them a paragraph to write, and turned toward the other section.

Every now and then, she would steal a look at Muroni, in order to guess from his expression what his intentions were. He was writing, but he paused to look at her very often. His demeanor, although not revealing his thoughts, still confirmed her suspicion that he was ruminating some mischief, inspired by pure brutality, or a sheer love of bravado; perhaps he had a wager with one of his companions that he would frighten her; perhaps he had merely the intention of causing her sorrow; perhaps — but who could guess what imp of mischief was urging him?

Every time their glances met, a smile would flit over his lipless, blade-like mouth — the covert, subdued smile that hides malignant thoughts. She was troubled, and it cost her considerable effort not to lose the thread of the lesson, and he, perceiving her embarrassment, stared at her triumphantly, and added more and more to her discomfort. Nevertheless, the "window-jumper" maintained, so far as any outward display of lawlessness was concerned, a correct deportment; he seemed absorbed in a single idea, and did not even turn around to talk with his neighbors.

The two long, weary hours passed as quickly as one could expect. After that evening, was to come the blissful rest of Saturday and Sunday. For Monday's lesson, Enrica Varetti arranged, as a task to the advanced section, a letter — to be addressed to a sister in a foreign land. When she requested the class to leave the school in

good order, young Maggia hissed between his teeth, but fortunately the ringing of the bell and the noise of departure prevented this insult from being noticed.

The pupils left the room in great disorder. Muroni leered at Signorina Varetti in an indecent manner, when he passed her table; but she affected not to see him. A number of the men said good-night, politely.

A hubbub was occasioned outside by the departure of Signor Garollo's pupils—it was like the exit from the top gallery of a popular theatre on Mardi-Gras night. Shouts, hisses, whistles, howls, the stamping of wooden shoes, cat-calls, commingled to create pandemonium. In the confusion of questions and answers, Enrica Varetti heard her name pronounced quite often, likewise comments on her figure, followed by laughter, insinuating exclamations, guffaws and a howling like that of wild beasts. For about

a minute or two, the striking of matches, the flames of burning papers applied to cigars and pipes, illuminated the fog like the shining of stars in the mist. Little by little, the uproar died out; nothing more was heard but the echo of the far-away noises of the suburb. A profound silence soon followed.

VII

NRICA VARETTI left the school room under a tranquil frame of mind. Her class was not as bad as she imagined; there were some honest men in it, who might be disposed to check the mischievous boys; above everything, the image of Perotti, whose honest face was like a protection, soothed and comforted her. She asked Signor Garollo, whom she met on the staircase, about him, and he spoke of her favorite pupil in the highest terms. He was a good mechanic and an excellent *paterfamilias*, who had worked as

a cabinet-maker before entering the tannery; and he had constructed two or three graceful pieces of furniture for the pedagogical museum. Both Perotti and his son were very desirous of gaining an education; they hastened from the tannery to the school house without eating their supper, thus going without food for ten successive hours: and the youngest boy, who had finished the second elementary course, would correct his father's exercises, when the latter returned at night. "You will find out," concluded the principal, "that there are some respectable fellows in your class. If, however, any trouble should arise, send the janitor for me and my presence will immediately quell any disturbance."

On Monday, Signorina Varetti went into the school with far greater confidence and self-possession than she had been able to muster three

days ago; although she was still held in thrall by fear of the "window-jumper."

But she discovered only too soon that the younger boys were no longer absorbed by the curiosity she had awakened in them on the first night; besides, they had found out that she was timid by temperament, and they no longer refrained from exasperating her.

While she stood writing the syllables on the blackboard, she heard a suppressed giggling, and she knew that somebody was making impertinent gestures behind her back. Then, too, the rogues talked aloud; some even went to sleep and snored so loudly that she was obliged to wake them up. Twice she was forced to interrupt her teaching, and, becoming disheartened, she hoped that the older pupils, vexed at being disturbed, would come to her assistance. Little Maggia was amusing his comrades by a series of peculiar calisthenics, which he performed with his hands and feet;

when she stopped to watch him, he simulated perfect innocence. He became so impertinent that she was obliged to turn her eyes in another direction, pretending not to notice his antics.

Silence reigned, when the "window-jumper" left his place, with his copy-book in hand, to ask some questions about the task assigned to him. Signorina Varetti trembled inwardly, seized by a presentiment that something of importance was about to occur. He approached ner in a dignified manner, affecting seriousness and, placing his book on her desk, asked her to explain a certain phrase. Literally trembling, and drawing herself back so that she should not come into contact with him, the young teacher leaned over the copy-book and read the first few lines of his "Letter to a Sister."

Suddenly, prompted by her deeply outraged feelings, she grasped the book in both hands,

tore it in two, and pushed it away. His letter was a declaration of love to her.

The young fellow grasped the torn pages and returned to his seat, with head down and a sinister smile on his face. For a few moments Enrica remained perfectly quiet, her face white as snow; then she made an heroic effort and resumed the lesson.

Such an unexpected occurrence kept the class in a quiet mood of anticipation. Toward the end of the lesson, when she arose to write on the blackboard again, she was startled by the sound of a spitball, which struck the center of the blackboard and fell at her feet.

Her cheeks flushing, she turned to discover the guilty party. The ball could not have been thrown by Muroni, for it certainly came from the middle of the room. The expression on Maggia's face was impenetrable; the other lads were as immobile as statues.

"Who did that?" she asked, in a moved voice.

She endeavored to read the answer to her query in the countenances of the older pupils; she looked at Perotti in particular. They all bent their heads. Discouraged, she made one more effort to swallow her tears, and proceeded with her work.

The last insult oppressed her tender heart more than did the insulting love-letter of Muroni, although the latter was more offensive to her womanly pride. Her sad countenance resulted in keeping the pupils quiet for awhile, with the exception of young Maggia, who did his best to make everybody laugh. However, the older men began to grow indignant and they hushed him up. With a heavy heart, and paying no further attention to Muroni until the end of the lesson, she called on the scholars to read aloud by turn. Fascinated, as it were, despite herself,

something made her look once at her tormentor; his expression made her blood run cold; it was not that half-curious, half-scornful glance of the first evening, but it was a sharp, threatening glare, darting defiance from half-shut eyelids, that spoke of hurt pride, of vengeance, of an avowed declaration to get even. In a second she pictured herself attacked, struck, stabbed, stretched lifeless on the snow; and again she felt the blood freeze in her veins, and her knees trembled as if she were in the throes of a high fever.

At the close of the session, she noticed a number of pupils crowding around Muroni in the hallway, to inquire the meaning of the school mistress's wrath against him. Perotti was one of the last to leave.

Signorina Varetti called him back.

He approached her very respectfully, hat in hand.

"You certainly saw," she said, her voice still quavering, "how I was insulted by the throwing of the spitball. If I do not discover the guilty one and bring him to punishment, they will insult me still worse. Why, since you are a gentleman, do you refuse to tell me who the culprit was?"

Thoroughly abashed, Perotti lowered his face, but gave no reply.

"Why don't you denounce the guilty one?" she repeated.

"Ah, my dear young lady," spoke the laborer frankly; "for the reason that I don't want a knife thrust in my back."

A look of disgust crossed Enrica Varetti's face. "But it was only a mere boy," said she.

"Just so," the other responded; "they are the worst of the lot."

The teacher would say no more, and Perotti left, hat in hand.

VIII

HER first thought was to give up the class. But the sentiment of offended dignity conquered; it would be cowardice to yield thus suddenly to the insult of a boy, the worst in the school. She decided to persist, and to conceal her fear and her discouragement.

Inadvertently, Signora Baroffi brought the subject up next morning at breakfast, complaining that the pupils of her evening class had bored

the bottom of the inkwells fixed in the benches, in such a manner that on the following morning the ink oozed out and ruined the girls' dresses. Then Enrica, her resolves to the contrary, spoke of her own anguish of mind. Her listener in a heavy, imposing tone of voice, delivered her customary lecture: "Do speak to them," she entreated; "deliver a fine speech that will move them to tears. Until you gain appreciation in this way, your efforts will be in vain. I will write a speech for you, if you wish. Your motto should be, *Sursum corda*. Ah, if I only were in your place, I should have them kissing my hands, like grateful slaves."

Signorina Varetti did not mention a word about the Muroni episode; for, although he had insulted her grossly, he had now made the purpose of his registration clear, and removed from her mind that dreadful load of uncertainty. Her fear of his revenging himself for his wound-

ed vanity weighed less upon her than the awful mystery of his possible intentions.

Unfortunately, the third session was more stormy than the second. She saw, at the start, that there was some agreement between the most unruly boys to create a disturbance; and the countenance of Muroni showed that his plan of attack had changed completely. He sat on the bench with a bravado air, his hands thrust in his pockets, one leg over the other, gazing at her from head to foot, and from foot to head, accompanying his glance with a continual smile, as if he desired to make her know what made him gaze at her figure with longing eyes. She noticed further, that there was an understanding between him and little Maggia; for he encouraged the boy's impertinence by sly glances. She withstood it as long as she was able, without reproving anybody. But, without wishing to do so, the socialist, Lamagna, precipitated an

uproar. It happened that when one of the pupils of the right section read these words aloud from the *Italian Artisan*, "An upright man, even if poor, is always contented and honored," Lamagna laughed ironically, and at the top of his voice, and cried: "What kind of nonsense is that?"

The boys burst out laughing.

Enrica was comforted to see that the peasants and shepherds looked reproachful and shocked, and even admonished the others for their bad conduct. It was a most timely token of sympathy, that gave her courage enough to threaten the miscreants with expulsion; but her voice was so tremulous and awed that no one heeded her threats. In the midst of an interruption caused by little Maggia, his strong, dwarfed, herculean uncle arose and showed him the whites of his eyes and his enormous fist; the man was raging like a mad bull, but all his

anger served only to hold the rascal in order for a few moments. He did nothing openly which would warrant his expulsion; that is, Signorina Varetti was unable to catch him in the act.

With a marvelous rapidity and variety of gestures, grimaces and jokes, the boy excited the laughter of his more immediate and more remote neighbors; but when the teacher would turn her attention to him, he could always regain his composure in time to assume a serene and innocent countenance.

Finally, an outbreak occurred. Signorina Varetti called upon Muroni to read; when he had finished, he turned his back to her and remained standing. Owing to his posture, she could not see what he was doing, but the hilarity of the young boys made her suspect that it was some insult to her, and she changed color.

Cries of indignation burst forth and she heard the voice of Perotti crying, "For shame! for shame!"

Muroni turned suddenly, and fixed his two terrible black eyes upon him, in which shone a positive thirst for vengeance. He hissed between his set teeth: "I'll see you later."

Signorina Varetti's heart stood still; she saw an imaginary knife blade in the air; her sight grew dim; she did not have courage enough to pronounce a word of reproach. Anticipating a fight, the class remained quiet. For Perotti's sake, the poor girl now wished that the lesson might never come to an end. When the time for closing came, she summoned up sufficient resolution to say, in a weakly assertive tone: "Leave the room quietly and go home at once; don't cause me any more sorrow."

The "window-jumper" awaited Perotti on the avenue, in front of the school house. Enrica Varetti, trembling like a leaf, stood on the threshold of the door. In vain she had entreated the janitor to interfere with the antagonists; he

told her that he would separate them as soon as they came to blows; but he did not budge from his position behind the young teacher. Perotti and Muroni, face to face, stood under the garish light of the street lamp. The crowd was silent; she could hear their voices.

"Just repeat what you said!" exclaimed Muroni. At that moment the whining voice of Perotti's son was heard, begging his father to go away; it appeared as if he were trying to drag him home by sheer force.

A cold, clammy perspiration stood on Enrica's brow.

From the tone of Perotti's voice she knew that he was retracting; she heard him say confusedly: "Among friends—it is hardly worth the while—when a fellow says what he feels about——"

The boys gave vent to a prolonged "ah!" —a sign which showed their disappointed dis-

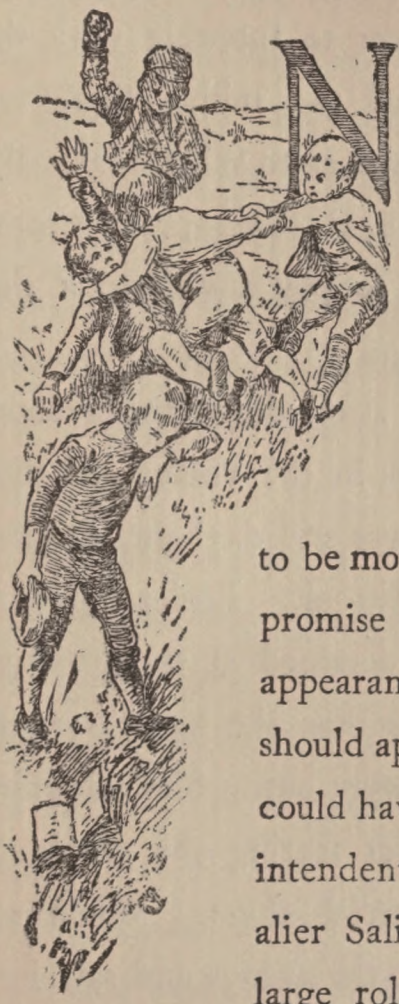
gust at the "backing out" of Enrica's sole defender.

Muroni's voice arose, strong and clear, over their murmuring: "Keep your observations to yourself—" the rest she could not make out; it sounded like so much hissing.

Perotti replied apologetically; the quarrel was avoided; the two contestants and the crowd moved on.

Enrica breathed again. But she knew now that no one would protect her in the future against any insult, howsoever gross.

IX



NOW how could she continue teaching her evening class without establishing discipline? She thought of calling Signor Garollo to her aid; but she knew him: he would exhort her to be more patient, and he would promise again "to put in his appearance" when matters should approach a climax. She could have recourse to the Superintendent of Schools, the Chevalier Salis, the owner of the large rolling mills; but he was a man one could never find — always at Turin when one sought him at Sant' Antonio,

and *vice versa.* Moreover, he had made it a hard and fast rule never to interfere with the workingmen outside of the mill. Signorina Varetti was still in doubt as to what course she should pursue for the next session, when some one came to beg her to pay a visit to a sick child in the suburb.

They had only to stroll down the avenue, to walk a hundred steps in the village and they would be there; as it was still daylight, she had nothing to fear from Muroni. Enrica started at once. But she was detained at the patient's home for a longer time than she had expected; it was dark when she went out. She was going to ask for an escort, but fearing she would be laughed at, she departed alone. When she reached the entrance to the avenue and saw how deserted it was, she stopped. Then she walked resolutely down the small path tracked through the frozen snow, casting suspicious glances to

the right and to the left. She thought the way had never been so long; it seemed to her that she would never reach the bench which marked the middle of the avenue. She had scarcely arrived at the spot when she saw a man jump suddenly into the road, from behind a huge tree trunk at the left, and plant himself five feet from her. The blood beat at her temples — it was Muroni!

She stopped, as if paralyzed.

The fellow moved a step forward; she was unable to budge; her feet seemed nailed to the ground. The young fellow asked, in a low, hoarse voice: "Why did you tear my copy-book?"

She did not reply.

"That is no way to treat a man," said he.

She remained silent, trembling from head to foot.

"I might make you repent it," he went on.

She shook so violently that the rascal noticed it.

"Why are you afraid?" he asked, looking around. "There is no one here; give me a kiss."

He made a move toward her.

The Signorina burst into tears. At that moment a shadow appeared at the end of the avenue.

"I only said it in fun," he hastened to say. Then he added in a threatening voice: "Don't you breathe a word about this."

The young teacher fled, with trembling steps, toward the school house.

She was so terribly upset when she entered the house that she did not even think of denouncing the man to the police. When she had partly recovered she thanked God, as if she had met with some great piece of good fortune, for having escaped from that meeting,

with no further harm than a severe shock. She formed a firm resolve never to leave the house unaccompanied at night. She took some comfort in the thought that Muroni would never molest her in that fashion again; for her tears and her fright must have awakened some pity in his soul; and her suffering must have been all the vengeance his offended pride could demand.

And truly, during the next lesson, the "window-jumper" conducted himself entirely differently. Still, there was something in his manner which told her that the change was merely on the surface. She felt that he had returned to his former ideas, the ones he held before he commenced to persecute her, and that he was more resolved than ever to accomplish his fiendish purpose. He did not look at her with that suggestive way of his; but far from expressing benevolence, his glances showed more hatred than ever. He would look at her, and

think, and bite his finger-nails, evidently concocting something, a number of things, and from his aspect it was evident that he had found, so far, nothing to suit him. And thus he conducted himself for several evenings, always looking more thoughtful, more revengeful. His bearing became intolerably torturing for the poor little teacher. She would have preferred a thousand times to have questioned him, to have asked him to explain himself, to have beseeched his mercy —anything rather than the persecution of this perpetual threat; for what could he do to her that could make her suffer more than she had already endured from the morbid fancies of her imagination?

When Enrica was alone, and able to reason the matter out more calmly, she tried to penetrate into the depths of the man's thought with the aid of her vague, scanty knowledge of the lower classes—a knowledge that had only come

to her at second hand. For example, she reasoned that he had desired to win her, as he would desire any other woman, merely to satisfy his brutal passion, and that he hated her on account of the aversion she had shown for him; moreover, he despised the upper classes, from which she sprung, and he manifested the keenest hatred and scorn for them; and on account of that very hatred of class (urged on by his own inherent weakness of character, his wickedness and vanity) he would avenge himself by injuring, by tormenting, by threatening her. Urged by a cruel curiosity, he would desire to find out how she would sue for mercy, how she would cry and suffer and moan from his blows. He would desire to conquer her, in order that he might call her by all those vile names, the only ones he had at his tongue's end; he cherished the thought that it should be in his power to humiliate her in the presence of everybody. All

this she read in the furious glances from his eyes, which at times glared like the fire in the eyes of a wild beast; she saw it in his manner of drawing breath with his lipless mouth, as if he were holding back an outburst of rage. She was haunted, nay, she was terrified by such fancies; she tried to drive them from her thoughts, but they were stronger than her weak will and would not be quieted.

The young boys, no longer encouraged by the "window-jumper" to outbreaks of disorder, behaved somewhat better during the next few lessons.

But the little Maggia always managed to precipitate some disturbance or other. One evening, she was obliged to suspend him from school, for placing a narrow plank across the passageway in such a manner that the pupils, on their way to the blackboard, stumbled and fell. The older men still preserved the best of be-

havior; but the sneers of the boys, when they made mistakes in reading or writing, aroused their elders' anger to such a degree that Signorina Varetti sometimes feared all would come to blows; but this never occurred. Uncle Maggia continued to study with the obstinacy of a mule. The shepherds plodded along diligently.

One night, Enrica had a brief discussion with the pupil Lamagno, who had always shown the deepest respect for her. He endeavored, however, to make her understand that he would not admit a social superiority in her, that he considered her no more above him than a woman of his own class; instead of putting her behind a counter to sell provisions, accident had made her a school teacher to impart knowledge from behind a desk. Signorina Varetti was much amused by an idea of his, to the effect that labor was rewarded by conscience. He explained, in his own way, that the more talented

men should receive no greater recompense on that account, than those without any talent; on the contrary, they should receive less, since genius was an aid to labor and was a reward in itself. Enrica, although she knew that this idea did not originate in his brain, made some objections to his theories in a pleasant manner. "That is just my way of thinking," he replied dryly. Here the conversation ended. And the young lady thought that a period of lasting quiet had begun.

Nevertheless, as the class grew more familiar with her, she noticed certain changes, especially among the older ones. It appeared that by degrees they were feeling the sexual influence of her person, which was slowly spreading from the youngest to the oldest. She had begun to notice in the fixed and prolonged glances of her pupils, an expression of solicitude, respect and sympathy, in which the intention of capti-

vating her good will, and amorous desires (whispered in one another's ears) were perfectly apparent. Enrica observed among the men a visible yearning to please, in order that they might gain her admiration. They would pretend to pay profound attention to her explanations, approving all she said with a nod of their heads, preparing their lessons with great diligence, walking to her desk and asking for explanations about all sorts of things. Even those who had looked at her with indifference, would glance at her now from head to foot, letting their eyes rest on every part of her person, as if wanting to take her measure for a dress.

The adults assumed an attitude of benevolent protection, openly disapproving the disturbers; and she observed a radiant smile of satisfaction pass over their faces as they listened to the sweet inflections of her voice; but she

divined, better than she could see, something unusual going on in their inner consciousness — a movement, an attempt to dispel a sudden thought, whenever she approached their benches to look at their writing. All these manifestations annoyed her; she hesitated to walk down the aisles; she was compelled to pay undue attention to their gestures and attitudes; she shrank with a child-like timidity from mentioning certain phrases which were equivocal in meaning, from reading certain passages, in the book, which required an effective intonation. Nevertheless, in their very expression of thoughts and desires which so troubled her, she saw, like the sudden flashes of revelation, many qualities of a noble soul, a certain delicacy which she had never imagined they possessed, and which were habitually concealed under the coarseness of their manners, by the use of vile

language, by a vulgarity more the result of choice than of nature.

The boys were the only incorrigible ones, and Muroni, the only adult who inspired her with an unconquerable repugnance, made still worse by a new occurrence. One Sunday evening there ascended to her room the distant cries of a quarrel which was taking place near the "Gallina" inn. She ran to the window and saw a crowd at the end of the avenue; a fierce fight was raging. From the black mass of people a man sprang forth, like a shadow, and ran down the avenue with the speed of the lightning; another figure darted after him. When the first one passed in front of the school house, the teacher heard the sharp cry of: "Help! help!" which resounded in the inmost depths of her soul. The man darted behind the church, his assailant followed, swift as an arrow from the bow. The janitor, who was regard-

ing the affair from behind the door, recognized Muroni as the pursuer. Enrica remained standing where she was, with beating heart, waiting to hear of a murder. Nothing happened, however; the victim escaped. But this cry of "help," in which the dreadful terror of death resounded, still rang in her ears, and filled her mind with a still more violent horror of her enemy.

X

ON the following day (this terrible incident still weighing heavily upon her mind), Enrica Varetti was crossing the open fields covered with snow, on her way to the suburb to do some shopping, and thinking that Muroni would not dare to stop her in broad daylight in front of the school house, when she saw him emerge from behind the building and walk toward her. Terrified, she turned around; only a group of little children, sliding on the ice of the avenue, could be seen at about one hundred paces from her.

It was too late to turn her back, unless she ran; but that seemed to her a cowardly act.

She was armed with a desperate courage, born of the excess of fear, and she moved directly toward him, with unsteady step, but head erect.

They met on the narrow path traced through the snow.

They drew to a halt, at three paces from each other.

He removed his pipe from his mouth and put it in the pocket of his coat, and, holding his thumb over it, he looked at her with a smile that made her tremble. He seemed to be thinking of the words with which he intended to begin the conversation.

Signorina Varetti took advantage of his hesitation and commenced with an outburst of indignation: "Why do you not treat me with respect?" she cried, with tears in her voice, and she took a step backward. "How dare you insult a woman, who is unable to defend her-

deMatters

self? But what do you want of me? Why do you stop me? What have I done to you?

He looked around the field rapidly; she feared that he was going to take hold of her.

"Do, at least, respect the memory of my father. I am the daughter of a soldier, who died on the field of battle."

At this moment, all fear disappeared from her face, contracted by a sob, and gave way to an expression of utter contempt for him, and reverent love for the memory of the father whom she had invoked.

Muroni, looking at her attentively, said in a low tone of voice and very tranquilly: "I don't wish to do you any harm."

This response diminished her terror, and her tears were able to find vent.

"I don't want to be stopped like this," she said.

"I didn't stop you," he answered, looking around.

"Then let me go!"

He stepped to one side in the snow, and, while she was passing, said, in a tone of complaint, rather than rancor: "I am not an assassin."

Fearing lest he take her silence for an insult, she turned around and said, in a voice which still trembled with tears, and which sounded, despite her efforts, very supplicating: "No? then don't ever stop me like this again."

Having spoken thus, she was surprised at not meeting his glance, which shrank from hers. She hastened away with hurried steps, and when she reached the end of the field she turned, involuntarily to look back. He turned around just at that moment; he had not moved from the spot where she met him.

XI

SHE returned home frightened and trembling, but comforted by the feeling of having gained a victory; still more, by the thought that she had displayed more courage than she had believed herself capable of mustering.

The fact that Muroni had avoided her glance when she turned around, seemed to her at first, a sign of shame and regret, which must augur well for the future. She recalled to mind the advice of Principal Garollo, who had said to her that with the proletariat one must be bold and outspoken; and the ideas of Signora Baroffi,

according to whom, a noble and impassioned word would suffice to soften the hardest of hearts.

Despite these conjectures, Enrica soon drove these illusions from her mind, thinking of the young man's evil career, his cruelty to his mother, his cynicism—that never-to-be-forgotten cry of "Help, help," uttered by that unfortunate fellow, feeling the grasp of death upon his shoulder. It was only now that she recognized why Muroni had conducted himself as he did at their first meeting on the avenue—he was afraid that she would resist vigorously and call people to her aid.

Nevertheless she went to school on that evening with less trepidation than curiosity to see in what manner the "window-jumper" would conduct himself. His behavior was indeed changed, but not in the way that the young teacher could have wished. He no longer dis-

played a visible hatred, nor did he look as if he were entertaining some project for mischief. He gazed at her with an attentive curiosity—as it it were the first time he had seen her—which was entirely free from that glare of resentment for his hurt pride.

Had the school mistress been able to penetrate inside his brain and see what thoughts were moving within it, she would have discovered that it was exactly her indignation, her suppressed sobs and tears, the proud invocation of her father's memory, that had wrought the change in her arch-enemy. Not that his heart had been touched in the least; but her whole bearing was something entirely new to him—it was a revelation of sentiments and feelings that he had never imagined to exist in the breast or any woman. He beheld her now as a curiosity, as a peculiar being, incomprehensible, impossible for his intelligence to grasp.

It dawned on him for the first time, in a vague sort of a way, that her dislike for him was due to a stronger, more profound, more delicate antipathy than his reason could fathom.

Moreover, he was beginning to feel the influence that the presence of the young woman exerted over all her older pupils, although he was impressed by it long after the rest of the class. She was so different in spirit, in appearance, in manners, from the other women he had known in his life. Genuine ladies, he had seen only as they passed on the street — from a distance, as it were — and it had never occurred to him that, owing to birth and breeding, they were entirely apart from the women of his class; that is to say, he thought the only difference between the women of the lower and the upper classes lay in dress and manners. If any other distinction existed, it must be that the latter concealed their perversity better; that the ease and

luxury of their lives aided them to disguise their moral and mental corruption. Signorina Varetti had upset all his ideas on that subject. She was the first lady he had seen so closely, as often as he wanted — every evening, in fact; the first one who had spoken to him and who, in a certain sense, cared for him; the first one whose breath had touched him, at whom he could gaze as long as he liked (just as if she were in his own house), whose every gesture, facial expression and tone of voice he could watch closely for two long hours every day.

Muroni noticed all these things as soon as his intolerable vanity had given way, allowing more scope to his faculty of observation. It was all wonderful to him, and led him to believe that it was not a mere polish, a veneering, as he had at first fancied, but an actual and thorough-going dissimilarity in blood and bones and flesh. To him, Enrica Varetti was a new variety of

the human species. Notwithstanding his selfish pride, born, as in all men of his peculiar disposition, of a preponderant and unlimited ambition, of the knowledge that he had qualities and abilities above the average, which had been deadened by poverty and lack of education—Muroni discerned in the young teacher something which was superior to him, and which caused humiliation without arousing any bitterness of feeling.

He followed diligently, with eye and mind, every movement she made, the expressions of her countenance, her accent, as if trying to discover the cause of the effect she produced on him; like one who tries to analyze the sensations which are awakened by music. At times, he would rebel against this influence with all the rage of scorn, returning to his old suspicion that it was all the result of a superficial gloss; but it was a suspicion that he could not long maintain.

He endeavored to battle against himself, calling to mind wicked images—in the midst of which he would place her, tainted and distorted by some vile environment. He ransacked the depths of his fancy, to place himself on a common vantage ground with her—all his worst thoughts, all his deviltries, all his abominable aberrations, he called to his help. But no matter what vagaries he indulged in, her figure always arose, pure and serene, from the foul waters in which he immersed it, like a vapor from a misty lake: always did she reappear behind her desk, with her white forehead, her childlike grace, her dignified modesty, with I know not what air of power and domination, whose spirit and real essence he could not grasp, which pleased him and angered him at the same time; which bewildered him, mystified him, mastered him, and made him, after he had left the room, give vent to blasphemous ejaculations,

vile and brutal curses, as if the force of his nature were undergoing violent reaction against the tenderness that was working its way into his blood.

This transformation was slow in coming and Enrica did not notice it at first; perhaps for the reason that Muroni, wishing to keep up his reputation for bravado among his associates, would give a reckless exhibition of his ability to create disturbance and disorder, every once in a while, without fearing punishment or heeding consequences. But he did this in a new way, rather to call attention to himself than to give offense to the school mistress, who, vaguely suspecting his motive, did not mind his disobedience so much now as she had in the past.

After a few days, however, she noticed a decided change in the young man; he worked at his writing diligently; he tried to moderate the harsh tones of his voice when reading; he accepted his corrections much more graciously

than he had at first; he even tried to make her give more time to them, as if he were enjoying a pleasant conversation. One evening she dropped her pen on the floor and Muroni passed with a rapid movement to the end of the first row, where it happened to roll, picked it up and handed it back.

The class uttered a murmur of surprise.

He rendered her another service, still more polite. There would appear, every now and then, at the end of the heater some large mice, which made their way from the tannery, passing through the long coil of water pipes; and the pupils, without attempting to kill or chase them away, amused themselves watching the fear Signorina Varetti's face plainly showed, as she heard the rodents gnawing inside the pipes. One night the mice put in their appearance again, and as the teacher evinced once more her uneasiness, the "window-jumper" darted out

of his seat, amid the snickering and giggling of the pupils, and kicked at the heater and put the vermin to flight, after which, as if to hide the courtesy of the act, he returned to his place, cutting a grimace at the class to awaken laughter.

This act, nevertheless, was noted and, connected with certain other indications, awoke a peculiar suspicion among the more astute pupils; the little Maggia was the first one to give vent to it. He began to watch the teacher and the young man, running his fox-like eyes continually from one to the other; coughing slightly when Signorina Varetti would question Muroni; nudging his neighbors with his elbow, winking slyly when he caught the "window-jumper" in a deep contemplation of Signorina Varetti. But all this he did cautiously, knowing that Muroni was not a man to be trifled with.

The young teacher had soon discovered the motive of the boy's actions, and, having noticed

the change in Muroni, she would have been disposed to look at him less diffidently and to have questioned him more frequently, had she not been tormented by the continual vigilance of the smiling, malignant eyes of little Maggia, which were forever trying to look within her mind. But, after all, this was but a minor trouble, now that she had been freed from her worst torture, and comparative peace and security had re-entered her life.

XII.

SIGNORINA Varetti was more tranquil now because, not knowing the young men of this class and fiber, she thought that Muroni's altered behavior would grow steadfast and fixed. But when he saw that, owing to his better conduct, her repugnance and fear had vanished, without leaving a feeling of sympathy to take their place, and that she treated him with the same indifference as the other pupils, then he suffered a disappointment that incited him the more. The fear, the aversion he had awakened in her, was, at least, of some sat-

isfaction to his vanity, for they were the result of his notoriety, of his reputation as a man daring enough to undertake anything. Then he was not considered on a par with the other pupils; he had, in school and out of school, an advantage over his fellows, a supremacy of which it was his delight to boast. Now, whatever the cause might be, he found himself disarmed, as it were; he was without any means of attracting the young teacher's attention or of producing any effect upon her mind. And, as his sympathy for her increased, he felt more bitterly the difference in their social positions, his inferiority in culture, in education, in manners—in everything that could make him hope to touch a responsive chord in her bosom.

Thus, a new and sharper realization of his position, a new and confused ambition, turned in a different direction than at first, when he sought glory in wicked deeds, in vicious conduct

and in fights, was gradually gaining ground in his mind. But this new ambition, not being able to find an outlet, burned within him like an all-consuming fire, increasing the ardor of his former passion. Nevertheless, by instinct, without even thinking of what he did, he tried to win approval in the young lady's eyes. A keen observer would have noticed that, from day to day, his hair was more carefully combed, his face and hands were cleaner, that there was a more studied neatness in his dress, something more dignified in his bearing, that he made no more gross errors in his lessons, that he did not blunder and stumble through them. All these things denoted his intention to improve his person and his mind, as if he were copying some model, or following an ideal.

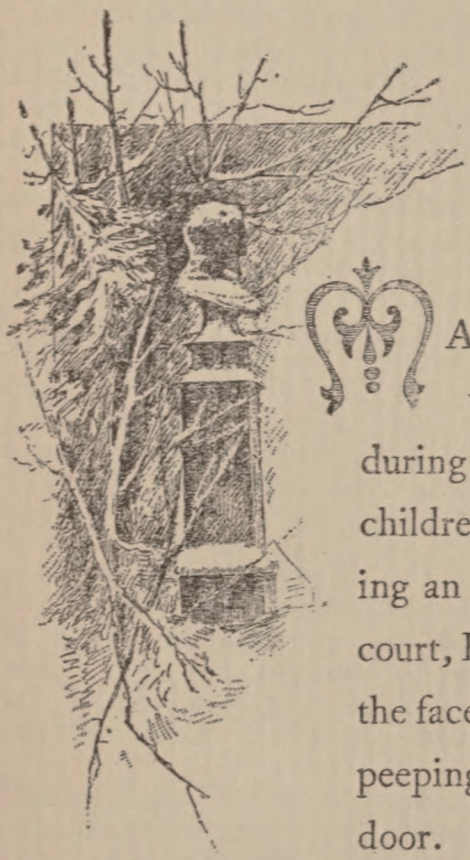
These symptoms, with the exception, perhaps, of his new way of looking at her, escaped the attention of the school mistress, and she was

led to believe that the thoughts which ran through his head were other than they were in reality. His glances were frowning, persistent, always directed at her figure, rather than her eyes, which he appeared to avoid; they watched her slightest movement, as if each one had for him the significance of a written word, as difficult to comprehend as words of a foreign tongue. Likewise, he meditated on every phrase that passed her lips, differing at all from the conventional language of the school; as though they were so many rays that would allow him to penetrate the hidden recesses of her mind, and discover what strange, mystic faculty gave her the power to produce sounds, the like of which he had never heard before.

When the school mistress entered and left the room, by taking advantage of those moments when Muroni thought he could see without being seen, she met his sharp, eager, ardent

glance; covered, so to speak, by a thin veil of shame—not shame for his past disgraceful insolence, but for his nascent passion. However, she believed that it was the former, and she was reassured by this conviction.

XIII.



MATTERS stood thus, when one morning, during the recess of the children's class, while taking an airing in the sun-lit court, Enrica Varetti beheld the face of Muroni's mother peeping through the outside door. As soon as the teacher beheld her, the old woman looked regretful and abashed, as if she feared that her familiarity might place her, in the mind of the young

lady, on the same low level occupied by her worthless son. The wretched woman walked in, with her hands under her apron, turning toward the teacher her martyr-like eyes, in which shone two crystalline tears. She approached her with a smile upon her worn countenance, as if a friendship of long standing had existed between them and she said in a low voice, with an air of mystery and an accent of suppressed satisfaction:

"He is doing better; do you know? he is doing a little better of late; he has quieted down some. He no longer abuses me. He no longer goes to the "Gallina." Truly, it seems like a dream to me, but in the evening he stays at home and studies. I thank the good Lord for it, day and night."

She looked toward the door suspiciously. She attributed that change to the school, and she came to thank the teacher, and to ask a favor of her.

"Pardon the liberty I take, dear young lady, but wouldn't it be well to take advantage of this opportunity, when he seems so well disposed, and to put into effect what I spoke to you about the last time? Why not try and put some religious feeling in him? Then he would resolve to do his duty, once for all. He has neglected the Holy Sacrament for ten long years now. Merciful God, do you understand me, for ten long years! And to think that I must give him my last cent from time to time to make him say a "Pater" or an "Ave," so that he does not go to sleep in church like a dog; I had an idea, too, from the motion of his lips, that he was saying quite different things! Ah, my dear young lady, since you have taught him so many other nice things, how I wish you would make him understand that the salvation of his soul is the most important of all! How, happy I would be to know, before I die, that he has found

forgiveness in the eyes of the Lord. Why not avail ourselves of this opportunity—it may be our last, I never knew him to be so good—which the good Lord has sent to us?"

The school mistress turned her face to one side, blushing with pride at the satisfaction these few words caused her. She replied that she had done all she could, but that she had not been able to do very much.

"Anyway," said the woman, casting another glance at the door, "one must confess that the night school is a great blessing, for it has done good to my son; and his change is due to the school and nothing else."

At this point, struck by a new idea, she remained absorbed in thought, looking at the ground; then she exclaimed, raising her eyes: "Unless——"

Signorina Varetti looked at her closely.

"Unless," proceeded she, "it is due to a feeling of sympathy — as — as it was last year with the butcher's daughter."

Suddenly, the teacher had a suspicion, but it could be seen that the thoughts of the mother were a thousand miles from her.

"Still," continued the latter, after some reflection, "for all my pains, for all my questions, I have not found out a thing from him."

Then she returned to the subject of religion. The school mistress asked her why she did not see the priest of her church about the matter.

She replied excitedly that the little priest, almost a midget, was pleasant enough with everybody; that he was undoubtedly a good, saintly man; but he did not care to mix up with such matters. She suspected that he had a certain "regard" for her son; of course, by "regard" she really meant fear; but she used the

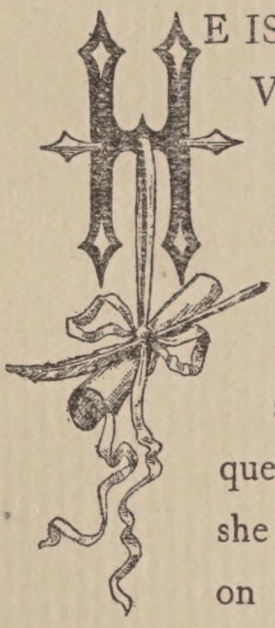
word out of respect, thus showing her maternal love and the pride she still took in her son. It was the same with other people: the Chevalier Salis, for instance, the proprietor of the iron mill; the doctor, who could have given him good advice and wholesome admonition—all of these entertained a "regard" for her son. They would even jest with him, when they met him; no one wished to wound his feelings. Finally she said:

"The good Lord will continue to help me, since he has commenced."

When she left, still thanking the school mistress, with a humble and affectionate expression of admiration, her bright eyes rested on Enrica Varetti for a moment, as if she had thought of something else to say; but whatever the thought may have been, she did not give it utterance.

"I will pray for you, my young lady," she murmured at the door, and turning her short, bent back, she walked away toward the church.

XIV



"HE IS conquered at last," said Enrica Varetti to herself. No longer had she to fear either insult or abuse; she could now walk fearlessly through the streets of the village; she was free; she was contented; she was proud of her great conquest. Armed with such thoughts, she did not hesitate for one second on the following day to go out alone at dusk.

Just as she was about to leave, a boy came in, bringing the keys of Teacher Latti's room and a note, written in pencil, asking Signorina Varetti to get a medicine vial, which stood in her room, and to bring it to her at the baker's

house in the village, where she had taken refuge; for she had been seized by a sudden attack of sickness. Enrica put the desired vial in her pocket, donned her bonnet and cloak and walked away hurriedly through the snow, which was falling in great white flakes. She found Miss Latti stretched at full length on a sofa, and being cared for by the wife and the two daughters of the baker.

"Ah, my dear friend Enrica," exclaimed the patient, holding out her hand languidly, "how glad I am to see you once more."

Her looks did not at all justify the sadness of her greeting. She had been merely afflicted with a headache, and having fallen on the street, from a false step, she had attributed her fall to a rush of blood to the brain.

After being taken upstairs, she had a quarrel with the doctor—a big, blonde fellow—who advised all his patients to take a trip to

Massawa; [1] he considered the air of that locality a panacea for every ill. She had fallen into a half hysterical condition after the quarrel.

"You may go," she whispered, in a husky voice, to her friend, after swallowing her medicine quickly. "I need you no longer. These good people here will take me home later — dead or alive!"

When Signorina Varetti, smiling in her sleeve, left the sick (?) one, it was almost dark. The snow was still falling; the avenue was covered, to the depth of ten inches, with long, white flakes. She hesitated for a minute, before plunging into it; then she pushed ahead resolutely. The two gas lamps, covered with snow, scarcely broke the dense obscurity of the night with their two rays of pallid light. The noise from the machinery of the two neighboring factories was scarcely audible, as if coming from

1 Italian colony in Africa.

underground; while the sounds from the anvils of the ironworkers, employed near the entrance of the avenue, seemed to come from a place far distant.

She had covered a third of the way, when she thought she saw a man move from behind a tree. She halted, holding her breath in suspense, then she took courage and moved on.

Two steps from the tree stood Muroni.

She was about to utter a cry, but she held it back on noticing that the man removed his hat.

"You again!" she exclaimed indignantly. "What do you want? Let me go."

The man replied in a hoarse but respectful tone of voice: "There is snow on the ground. I will make a pathway for you, if you permit me."

"I don't want it," replied the young lady. Go away from here, or I will call for help."

"Why?" he asked, in a low voice; "don't you think that I, too, have a little heart? Surely, you can't find fault with me of late."

Without giving her time to reply, he sprang five steps in front of her, and walked toward the school house, his head lowered, and pushing his feet through the snow, in order to open a pathway for the young lady.

Feeling somewhat reassured, Enrica walked behind him for a little way, without losing sight of him; but suddenly a dread of the man seized her, and speeding forward she tried to run away. He stopped short just at that second, and she brushed against him with her dress.

Losing all self-control and gasping out a suffocated "Oh!" Muroni turned brusquely and grasped the young teacher about the waist with both hands, seeking her face with his lips.

Struggling fiercely, Enrica threw back her

head, away from his strong breath, which smelled of cheap liquor and bad tobacco.

"Give me a kiss," he muttered; "just one kiss, and I will let you go."

Saying this, he removed his hands from her waist, to grasp her by the head, but Enrica, seeing her chance, glided from his arms and ran toward the school house with all the speed there was in her, shouting:

"Help! Help! Help!"

Her voice was so weak that no one could have heard her calls for assistance.

He followed her, breathless, speaking incomprehensible words in a sharp voice. Overcome with terror, her mind clouded, dazed, it seemed to her that she heard the words: "*Excuse me! Excuse me!*" Then she heard nothing more, not even his step.

She arrived out of breath at the school house, and stumbled into the hallway. She met the

janitor's wife with a light in her hand; she let herself drop against the wall, pale as death, almost swooning.

"What's the matter?" asked the frightened woman.

"A thief!" she replied.

The janitor himself, came running in. "A thief? A thief, did you say?" And, getting an iron bar, he ran through the courtyard and shut the door from the inside.

XV

ALL THROUGH the following night, the poor teacher was terribly feverish and worried. She was thinking of the best way of denouncing Muroni to the police; for she had come to the conclusion that such action was necessary. She also thought of reporting the matter to Signor Garollo, the principal of the school, and have him either expel Muroni, or report him to the authorities. It occurred to her, too, that she might betake her-

self to the Chevalier Salis, he being the most influential personage in the suburb, and ask him to provide some means of ridding the school of such an undesirable character as the "window-jumper." She resolved to take some decided step, as she felt that she could no longer stand such vile insults and such terrific shocks. The mere thought of it made her tremble like an aspen leaf.

When she arose on the morrow, she had made up her mind to go directly to the Superintendent of Schools, after notifying Signor Garollo, as his position, and good form, demanded that he should be notified. It was Sunday, and she planned to go to church first, thence to the office of Chevalier Salis.

Signora Mazzara put in her appearance, just as she was finishing her toilet; the Signora was, as usual, very much hurried, breathless, talkative; a smile upon her lips and a bundle of papers in

her hand. She had just seen Signora Baroffi concerning an article for a Christmas paper that some of the school teachers were desirous of publishing, for the benefit of one of their colleagues, the widow of a custom-house officer. She could stay but a few minutes; for she must run about Turin all day, to organize an amateur performance at the Scribe Theater, to raise funds for the establishment of an asylum for infants at Crocetta; she had to visit the School of Horticulture in Garibaldi street, where a friend of hers taught forty gardeners how to write; she wished to go to the Institute of the Good Shepherd, in order to find out what truth there was in the rumor, spread by a newspaper, that the nuns exorcised the devil every night to frighten the bad pupils. When she had said all this in a breath, she asked her friend how she was progressing with the evening school, and she appeared sorry to find her so sad and downcast.

"What is the matter with you? What has happened? Why are you so pale? What have they done to you?"

In truth, Enrica Varetti knew that she was not the most desirable person to confide in; but not having any better one at hand, she told her everything, even the occurrence of the previous evening.

"You have caused him to fall in love with you!" exclaimed the Signora, with much vivacity. "That's why he doesn't come to Sunday school any more."

She remained silent for awhile, as if to enjoy to the full all the romance of that adventure. Then she answered gravely, shaking her head:

"I wouldn't advise you to do what you intended doing." Being asked the reason for this disapproval, she answered promptly:

"You do not understand the nature of a man of this class. Such an action on your part would provoke him to vengeance."

"But what do you want me to do?" asked Enrica Varetti, in utter despair. "What vengeance can he take that is worse than what he is now doing? Kill me?"

"No, he won't do anything to you," resumed the other; "that's understood; but if he don't revenge himself upon you, he will do so on those who punish him; you may be as sure of that as if it had already happened. Don't burden your conscience with such a load of remorse."

"But, according to what you advise, I am to swallow every insult and ask for more," replied Signorina Varetti, resentfully.

Her friend remained silent for a few minutes. "But after all," she went on; "he has not even kissed you."

Enrica Varetti was not slow in showing her indignation and surprise. The Signora quieted her somewhat by saying:

"I understand, the insult still exists, and yet you tell me that he has apologized. After all, you must bear in mind what sort of a fellow he is, or, rather, was. It is already a great victory to have inspired in him such sentiments. What more can I tell you? If I were in your place, I should await further developments. I should complete the work of converting him. It is, indeed, a strange case." And, fixing her eyes upon her friend, she continued: "Ah, my poor Enrica, you have the face of a little princess. Take my advice, and forgive him once again; I am satisfied that nothing will happen. You don't know the young men of the working class; if one doesn't hurt their feelings or humiliate them, one can do almost anything with them, even with the worst of the lot.

Muroni, you will see, is going to become a perfect angel."

But Signorina Varetti was still sorely perplexed.

"Ah! the common people!" exclaimed Signora Mazzara, "believe me, we do not understand the common people; that is the reason why we do not love them. If they look wicked at times, it is only because they are not loved. Well, that's all I have to say about the matter. I'll be in again to see you soon. I am very anxious to learn how the matter will end. What have you decided upon doing, anyway?"

"I don't know," replied Enrica Varetti, looking out of the window at the chimneys of the iron foundries, as if they occupied her mind as a part of the problem.

The Signora made a start to leave, but she staid long enough to deliver a lot more of Turin

gossip. "There is going to be a wedding at the Sclopsis school. . . The Countess Di Rosa has invited me to one of the two magnificent balls that she is going to give in honor of her daughter. . . In the convent 'Visitazione' a girl attempted to poison herself, because they took a love-letter away from her. . . At San Filippo, Don Calandra is going to preach during Lent." She did not even cease her chatter at the doorstep. . . "Malon, the famous French socialist, will give a lecture to the workingmen of Turin; I hope that I can be there. Have courage," she finally called up from the street, with a flattering smile, "you dear, little lion-tamer."

XVI

AFTER hesitating a long time, Signorina Varetti concluded to wait a little longer, before taking any step regarding the reporting of Muroni to the authorities. On Monday evening she returned to her class, not a little troubled inwardly, but outwardly as tranquil as if nothing had happened. Sitting down at her desk, she noticed without looking directly at Muroni that

he had taken a pose she had never before seen him adopt — he was resting his chin on his hands, and looking down at the floor.

A minute afterward she discovered that he had been drinking; his hair was disheveled, his eyes were swollen and sleepy. Even through the dense veil of drowsiness and inebriation, Enrica Varetti could discern the return of the mean and wicked expression he had formerly worn; as if he had made up his mind to again worry and torment her, by his disorderly conduct in school. However, he did not create any disturbance that evening; he did not even change his posture, when she asked him to read, or questioned him about the lessons.

The next evening, he came to school looking like himself, the better expression on his face; and then she perceived that he was attentive, that he watched her, listening with that air of meditative admiration which he had shown at

their meeting in the avenue. But no longer did any sign of ambition or vanity make itself apparent in either his person or his actions. His face and hands were no longer fastidiously clean; he read carelessly, got his lessons indifferently; and plainly showed that he did not care to be questioned, but that he wished to be left alone in his corner, that he might watch her silently, like a faithful dog. Leaning his back against the wall at the right, that he might see her better when she turned toward the right section, his contemplation became so persistent that it attracted the attention of the more observing pupils, who would point and nod at him and whisper to one another: "Well, it's a fact; the 'window-jumper' is in love. Funny, ain't it?"

This time, however, he would have to be contented with wishing. It was well to have such "nerve," such a large dose of presumption. No one would ever have imagined that such a

knave, the author of so many evil deeds, with such a criminal record, would have aspired so far beyond his reach! And the men would have been the first to laugh at the whole thing if they had dared to risk his ire; but the boys, less prudent and more malicious, did not restrain themselves so well. Nevertheless, so great was the fear he inspired, that nothing would have happened if he had not provoked a quarrel himself.

Muroni, he who was the very first one to incite the others to annoy Signorina Varetti, now looked upon the other disturbers with threatening eyes. He commenced by regarding the disorderly ones absently, almost involuntarily at first, like a man held in thrall by a fixed idea; then, with the manifest purpose of quelling all infraction of the rules, he glared at one after the other of the evil-doers.

When they became aware of this, encour-

aged by finding themselves in accord, they grew still more disorderly; and to his anger there was now added resentment for a direct insult to him. The matter did not pass beyond limit, for several evenings in succession; then he became thoroughly aroused. The boys were the most obstinate in their misconduct, and that hurt his pride the more; for he had made powerful men tremble, by merely shaking his fist! When they, the lads, grew overbold, he began by muttering imprecations between his teeth, and threatening to thrash them when school was over. No one dared answer him to his face, but they responded all together, in chorus, like the obstinate growl of so many cats or dogs. This put him beside himself. The most persistent of all was little Maggia, who had just the stuff in him for the making of a future Muroni, and was already capable of affronting a man. A couplet in which *maestra* (teacher) and *Saltafinestra*

(window-jumper) rhymed, and so vile that it made Enrica Varetti blush deeply, must have been his work.

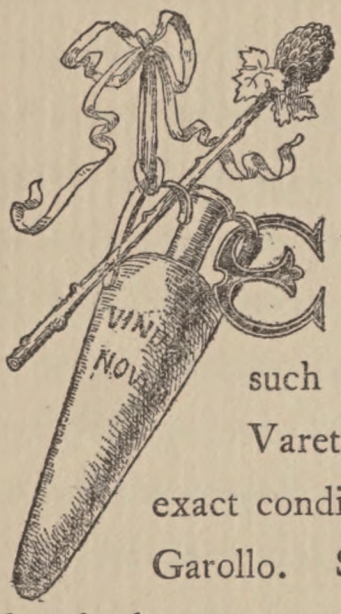
Now, indeed, did Enrica find herself in a painful and difficult predicament; she could by no means accept this too open protection of Muroni, her pupil of worst repute, nor did she know how to bring it to an end.

But there was something else, still worse. This passion that Muroni displayed for her, this continued admiration, mute and ardent, spread rapidly among the others, by virtue of sympathy, growing into a flame of mixed sensuality and sentiment, which she had noticed at the beginning of the first lessons. She saw now that even her oldest and most serious pupils regarded her with longing eyes; and she could guess that they were commenting freely on her figure; now and then she caught an expression of jealousy, even in the brazen face of little Maggia. It

was he, she thought, who had dared to stroke her skirts caressingly one evening, when she passed between the benches. The only ones who remained impassive were Perotti, with his honest, *paterfamilias* face, who always treated his teacher with the respect of an old servant, the uncle of Maggia, that kind of a brute, who studied obstinately, bending over his desk like an animal over a manger; and the socialist, Lamagna.

The latter, while being very careful not to show the teacher any obsequious reverence, since he considered her in the same light as he would have a companion in his workshop, was exceedingly provoked, nevertheless, by the bad conduct of his fellow-pupils, and was not slow to show his disgust at their display of vulgarity and grossness; because, according to his theory, the workingmen should teach the gentlefolk good manners, instead of disgusting them, and making them blush with shame for their shocking ways.

XVII



EVENING after evening, the disorder increased to such an extent that Signorina Varetti resolved to report the exact condition of affairs to Principal Garollo. So, one night, ten minutes after the lesson was over, when the pupils, on their way homeward, were filling the air with their discordant cries and calls, Enrica Varetti knocked at the door of Signor Garollo's apartment, her heart heavy with sorrow and anger. "Come in!" cried two thick voices.

She found husband and wife — those two small, rubicund figures, looking like brother and sister — sitting at a table which was fairly littered

with books and papers. The small parlor was austere in its plain and democratic furnishings, its only ornaments being portraits of Mazzini, Soffi, and Alberto Mario, which hung on one side of the room; on the other side, hung a large written chart, divided by colors into several parts, showing the salaries of the elementary teachers of the whole civilized world. The light was thrown upon the table by a small kitchen lamp, which stood upon an empty pasteboard box. "Ah, is it you?" said the principal, proceeding without further delay to launch out on his favorite topic. He was compiling a table of statistics, to show why the time spent by teachers in the other provinces should be taken into account when pensions were given. "And that is only justice!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

Signorina Varetti interrupted him to mention the object of her visit. She had been as patient

as she could, up to now, in order not to disturb him; but she could stand it no longer with such a class. Nearly all the pupils showed her every manner of disrespect; they insulted her openly; they turned the school room into a market place. It was absolutely necessary that he put in his appearance on the following evening, admonish them all, and warn the incorrigible ones to mend their conduct.

He rubbed his ear, as if bored by the request. "I will be there," he replied; "but I have told you before, that one must show determination when handling such a class."

"But what kind of determination is a young lady to show, toward forty men?" inquired Enrica.

"I used to keep them in order," cried Signora Garollo, her voice sounding like notes from a tombstone.

"I haven't your qualities," retorted Signorina Varetti, vexed.

Mrs. Garollo looked at her sharply.

"I fail to make them mind me," continued the young teacher, "because I do not know how to manage them; they do not heed my reproaches. But I am doing the best I can! They will drive me to despair yet! It is a martyrdom that I can stand no longer."

"That's all very well," cried the principal, losing his patience; "one must deal with these people in a peculiar manner; one must know how to go about the thing. It is not necessary to be so polite — I mean aristocratic — no, that is not the right word; I can't recall it; what do I mean? so autocratic. One must not let them see that one has a — a horror of them."

The poor teacher felt hurt again by these words. "Who has told you that I try to play the aristocrat?" she asked, resentfully.

"Who has told you that I act as if I had a dislike, a horror of them?"

"These people wish to be loved!" chimed in Mrs. Garollo, sententiously.

"And I do love them!" exclaimed the young lady, with a vigorous outburst of affection. "What should make you think differently?"

"Well," said Garollo in a conciliatory way; "we shall do it this way: for the time being, I shall give the janitor instructions to be present during class hours. His presence will be sufficient to keep the boys in order. And you, on your part, will report to me every evening, the names of the disobedient ones. If, however, anything serious occurs, you will send the janitor for me, and I shall only have to put in an appearance and then — Meanwhile, don't lose your courage."

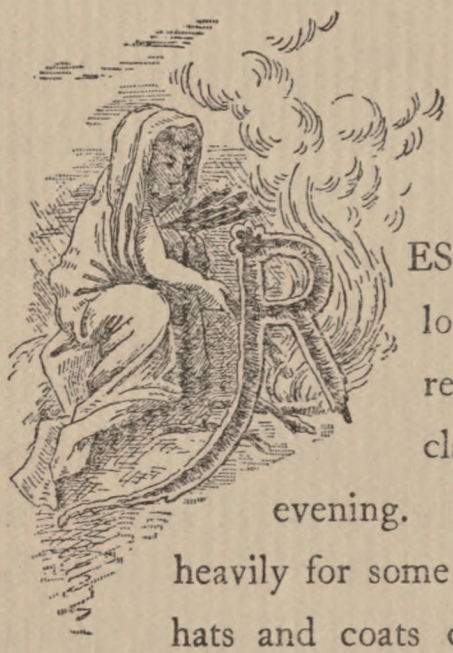
Enrica Varetti, sorely vexed, was about to reply: "You don't lose your courage, per-

haps!" but she swallowed her words before they escaped her lips. She bowed perfunctorily and left.

As she went out of the room, she overheard the voice of the principal saying, in subdued tones: "She doesn't know how to manage these people; she can't expect to get along with them."

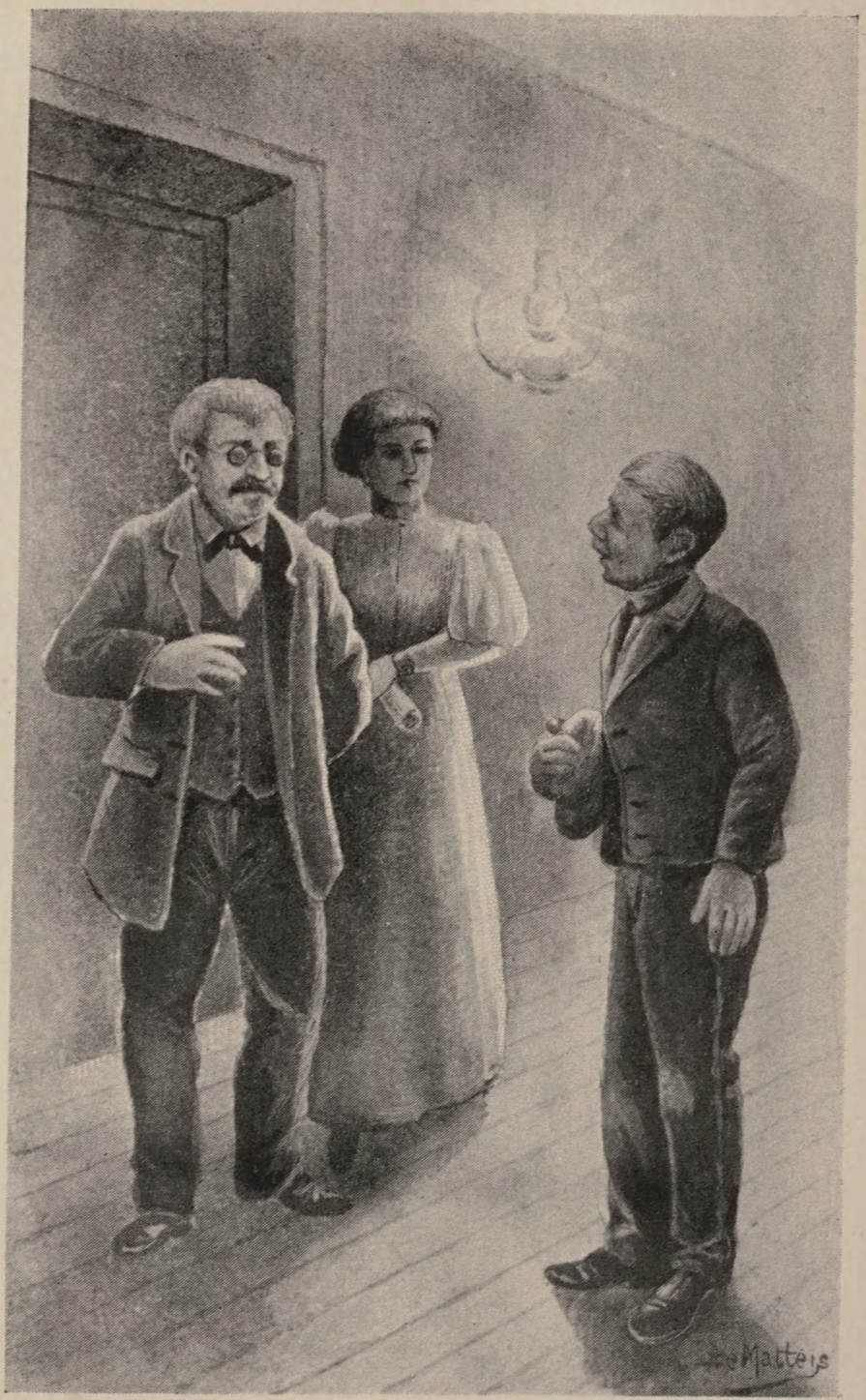
Her feminine curiosity made her linger to hear more; but Garollo was already talking about the school teachers of Brazil who, not to mention a house and garden, were receiving a certain percentage above their salaries, on the promotion of every pupil to a higher grade.

XVIII



RESIGNED to her hard lot, Signorina Varetti returned to teach her class on the following evening. It had been snowing heavily for some hours. With their hats and coats covered with snow, the pupils entered very noisily, stamping their feet on the floor and shaking their clothes.

The janitor had stopped the teacher in the hallway, asking permission to tell her something confidentially. Principal Garollo had ordered him to stay in the school room during class hours; but it seemed to him that it would be



better policy to stay outside, his ear at the door, and to enter suddenly on hearing the noise of the unruly; in this way he would be able to catch the guilty ones red-handed. Saying this, he winked, to better emphasize his cunning.

"Another coward!" thought Signorina Varetti, bidding him do as he chose, but looking at him scornfully. He tried to hide his satisfac tion, and placed himself at the door in a daring attitude.

Over twelve pupils were away that evening, and the teacher asked the cause of their absence. She learned that an old farmer, who had just returned from America, an odd, whimsical fellow, had invited them and half of the inhabitants of the suburb to listen to his adventures. It would have been a relief for her had the boys been absent, instead of the older pupils.

She had noticed from the first, that Muroni looked even more morose than usual. He must

have had some words with the lads before he came in.

She discovered, too, from the expression on the faces of her most audacious pupils, that there was a mutual agreement among them to stand up for each other, if any of them were attacked by Muroni, whom they had decided to provoke. In fact, no sooner had she turned her face toward the blackboard than she heard a chorus of laughter and impertinent remarks, worse than ever, that caused her a sharp pang of pain. Then there followed hoarse cries and ugly grimaces with vile words, passing in a loud whisper from bench to bench.

Suddenly, the noise growing still louder, the janitor put his head through the half open door and said: "Be silent; this isn't right;" but he disappeared with a rapidity so comical that half the class laughed uproariously.

A few minutes later, while the teacher was still writing, a small paper arrow fell at her feet; then came a chestnut. But such affronts did not hurt her feelings any more; to her sense of wounded dignity a profound sadness and a certain new strength of mind had succeeded, which enabled her to stand at her post, with all the fortitude and intrepidity of a sister of charity at the death-bed of one who is dying from a repulsive disease; as if she were expiating her sins and had merited her punishment. She wished to resist, to suffer until the end, to see how far they would carry their malignity; and if, finally, her saint-like conduct would not make them ashamed.

Suddenly, she heard an *O-o-o-o-h!* strong and prolonged by many voices, like a cry of scorn and defiance; and turning around she beheld Muroni standing upright on the bench, his eyes darting fire, his teeth clenched, shaking

his fist at the class. She opened her mouth to call for the janitor.

At that moment the door opened, and an unknown person stepped into the room.

A deep silence followed.

It was the inspector of the Turin schools, whom Signorina Varetti had never seen before. It was an old subterfuge of his, to visit the suburban schools during the most stormy evenings of winter, when he was least expected. His carriage had reached the school house without being heard, owing to the heavy snow on the ground. He had entered the court silently, motioning to the janitor not to announce his coming; and, hanging his coat to a hook on the wall, he had stopped at the door a little while to listen to the pandemonium; then he had made this dramatic entrance.

His tall, soldierly figure, clad in a tight-fitting suit of black, cut in military style, his

white mustache and goatee, inspired sympathy and commanded respect. The bulge in his back pocket told that he carried a revolver.

He was indignant.

"What kind of a place is this?" he asked, turning to the class, after introducing himself. "Is this the way you respect your school and your teacher? Are you honest workingmen, or what are you? I could not have believed that men would create such a disturbance! I am surprised, if they did it, that they do not blush with shame; that they allow the school of the people to be insulted in such a manner." Then, turning to the school mistress, with a sharp accent, and without lowering his voice: "And you, my young lady, how can you tolerate such disgraceful conduct? How do you keep discipline? If not for your own sake, then for the dignity of your office, you should

not tolerate such disrespect and such behavior. Tell me, is it this way every evening?"

The poor Signorina Varetti, standing in front of her judge, grew pale; she moved her lips to exculpate herself; but her mind was confused, troubled — the words would not come; instead, there came a flood of tears that she could not restrain; she drew out her handkerchief and cried like a child.

"Compose yourself," said the inspector, in a softer voice; "this will not help you to regain your lost authority."

Then he addressed the school again, in vigorous language, which all listened to with that fixed and stupid attention which the common people lend to actors in a melodrama; save the socialist Lamagno, however who was looking out of the window, with pretended attention, at a tree covered with snow, reflecting the light from the school lamps.

After finishing his reprimand, the inspector nodded to the teacher, who, with red eyes and a quavering voice, had taken up the lesson from where they left off; while he watched the pupils with a severe eye. All at once he inquired: "Who are your usual disturbers?"

She knew them all, but out of her kindness of heart, not from fear, she replied, for she thought it ignoble to expose the refractory ones to punishment, in a sweet, apparently sincere voice: "I do not know, sir. The disorder to-night was caused by a mere accident."

While she spoke thus, the inspector's eyes rested on Muroni, attracted by the contrast between the natural baseness of his features and the sentiment depicted upon them at that moment, and which appeared inspired by the teacher's answer, the gentle, noble meaning of which he had comprehended.

"Very well, young lady," he answered, "I will see you after school is over;" and giving a warning glance to the pupils, he passed out of the room.

The scholars, restrained by the fear of another sudden appearance of that personage, remained in perfect quiet until the class was dismissed; and then left the room in unusually good order, only making a suppressed noise.

But while she watched the exit of the last ones from the room, before going upstairs to meet the inspector, she heard Muroni's hoarse, angry voice, crying down the avenue: "You cowards!" and other voices, deadened by the snow, hurled back their insults from the distance.

XIX

AFTER that evening it seemed as if Muroni's passion for the school mistress and his hatred for his enemies increased at an equal pace, and that he was meditating upon some means for giving vent to the latter, since it was impossible to satisfy the former.

His passion was manifested in a manner peculiar to himself. Enrica Varetti never saw an expression of love or benevolence depicted on his physiognomy: his looks became more and more somber and his glances grew more sinister and fixed, as if the sentiments with which she

inspired him were gradually giving way to a longing for crime. A great tumult of ideas and sentiments raged in his small brain and in his heart, exasperated by hatred for the world. His fastidiousness for his own appearance increased; his disregard for his equals became ireful; he nursed a mad ambition to become educated, instructed, well-clad, rich by some miracle, some sudden stroke of fortune, some daring adventure. When in her presence, he was like a monster, guided in turn by pious impulses and violent concupiscence, and by affectionate, ferocious and lascivious fancies; by sudden revolutions of the mind, in which he would now have insulted and struck her like a fallen woman, and the next minute, would have humiliated himself, even to kissing the very soles of her shoes. At one time he looked like a stupefied man; at another, he looked like a man who is angry at, and ashamed of his own thoughts.

But no matter what passed through his mind, his outward respect for Signorina Varetti remained unchanged. It even appeared that he made this respect more visible, in order that he might give rise to the suspicion of some mysterious sympathy existing between him and the teacher; and this would have been, at least, some satisfaction to his excessive vanity. And, in truth, this suspicion did arise in the minds of the pupils, who watched them both more closely. This constant vigilance made it necessary for Enrica Varetti to avoid looking at him, in order that she might make the other scholars understand she was not in accord with her jealous, self-constituted protector; but many believed that it was a mere ruse on her part to conceal an ardent leaning toward the man. Moreover, Muroni was a fine-looking fellow, noted for his conquests among the women of his own station in life; and his companions were little able to

understand that his notoriety, which was his chief attraction among such women, was the very thing Signorina Varetti found so repellent; still less were they able to comprehend the distance created, between the couple, by birth and education. She was soon made cognizant of such suspicions by the sudden and ostentatious manner in which they turned from her to him, every time she questioned him about his lessons; also by their affected coughs, their sighs, the words half-restrained, the smiles with which even her more serious pupils regarded her.

These actions disturbed the young teacher to such an extent that she had to make strenuous efforts at self-control before calling on any of them to read aloud; and she had to calm both mind and nerves, to restrain the blushes that would have mounted to her cheeks had she addressed a question to the class unexpectedly. Thus she stood in constant dread lest she should

not succeed in concealing her distress; for then, without a doubt, her pupils would take such a display of emotion for a revelation of her love, rather than the effect of modesty and shame at their suspicions. Fortunately for her, one evening when she was most apprehensive, Muroni did not put in his appearance; and she did not see him at school for a number of days.

One morning, she noticed him, from her window, rambling about the meadow on the other side of the avenue, his head hanging low, his hands in his pockets, as if he were absorbed in thought. A few hours afterward, she saw him there again, seated upon a heap of stones, with his elbows on his knees, and his chin resting on his clenched fists; he was looking toward the school house, but she could not see the expression on his face.

That very evening at dusk, while Enrica Varetti was passing in front of the "Gallina," she

heard his hoarse, drunken voice amid the angry exclamations of the morra [2] players. The next morning she learned from the janitor that there had been a desperate quarrel between the "window-jumper" and certain other Turin outcasts; they had turned the whole inn upside down, and the inn-keeper himself had been obliged to seek refuge in flight. One could still see on the ground, pieces of clothing and snatches of hair, scattered over the snow. It was rumored, too, that Muroni had been obliged to take to his bed on account of a knife-thrust.

Three days later Enrica Varetti, on her way to school, noticed the young man seated on the curbstone, his hat on the back of his head, his hair disheveled, his hands in his pockets, motionless, pale; his chin was stained by the black juice of a cigar stump which drooped from his

2 A game of chance, played with the fingers and thumb.

lips, and his coat and vest were left unbuttoned, as if it were the middle of summer. Without being seen, the teacher cast a rapid glance at him, and detected on his face the marks of three days' and three nights' quarrels, idleness and dissipation—an evidence of brutalization that oppressed her heart, and made her disgusted at the mere thought of meeting him, face to face. Unable to turn back, however, she made up her mind to move straight on without turning her head; but when she noticed that he had seen her, and that he was arising slowly, not daring to approach, she was conquered by a sense of pity, and came almost to a standstill.

The young man was drunk, he could scarcely raise his hand to his hat, which at first he could not find; finally, uncovering, without raising his head, he looked at her long and fixedly, accompanying his look with a strange, stupid smile both tender and horrible, which at

the same time disgusted and softened Enrica, leaving her deeply upset.

On the evening of the following day, Muroni returned to school quite sober and clean; seeing Signorina Varetti again and hearing her voice once more, he acted as if all those tender sentiments, which had been dead for three days, had revived suddenly with greater force than ever, and he resumed his usual attitude of immovable and somber contemplation, while the boys were again given their longed-for opportunity to joke and laugh. But this time it looked as if he had changed his plans entirely. He did not threaten any more; he turned only to look, now at one and now at another, as if he wanted to fix in his memory their names and the insults they had heaped upon him; and, in these moments, his cold, inscrutable face was more sinister, and inspired more fear than when he uttered threats.

It went on like this for three or four evenings. Then, again, the "window-jumper" absented himself two or three times. During that week Enrica Varetti heard of another fight which had taken place at night, in an inn at the end of the village, between Muroni and certain peasants of a neighboring suburb; the next morning traces of blood had been found on the outside stairway leading to the chapel. One night she recognized Muroni's voice among a number of voices of people singing in the fields behind the school house. The next morning on arising, she was surprised to see him seated in the gutter of the avenue, under her window, his back resting against a tree and his chin on his chest, sleeping in the mud and slush. Then he returned to school one evening, drunk and sleepy, and remained quiet for two hours, his eyes shining with a stupid and childish admiration for her new dress of a gray color. He

aroused himself toward the end of the lesson, angry at a boy who had thrown the skin of a mouse on the platform, at the feet of the teacher. As they passed from the room and reached the street, she heard a great tumult; and the next morning she was informed that Muroni had kicked and cuffed the guilty boy. Then he disappeared for two more days, and somebody told her that he had been arrested.

But this was not true. The "window-jumper" was not seen for another day and night, and somebody said that he had gone to Turin. Signorina Varetti learned the truth from his mother, who had come to her in tears, and in a state of febrile agitation, with a face that was the very image of fright itself.

"Ah, dear teacher," she exclaimed, as she entered the room; "where is my son? I don't see him any more. What can have happened to him? How can I endure this life any longer?

Merciful God! I thought that son of mine had reformed." And she slowly tugged at a strand of gray hair, as if distracted, saying that her son conducted himself as if he were going crazy, that it was impossible to manage him, that he had threatened her with a hammer.

"Tell me, Signorina Varetti," she inquired, with trembling voice; "has anything taken place between him and his school mates? Has anything happened? Have they a grudge against him?"

The old woman had come quietly every evening, at school closing time, and, hiding herself behind the trees of the avenue, had overheard, on various occasions, threats of vengeance against her son.

The young lady answered, through compassion for her, that she knew nothing of that nature, and she tried to reassure the poor creature; but, being distracted by a certain expres-

sion which she saw in the eyes of the old woman — a scrutinizing and supplicating look, which she had never seen before — she could not find the right words.

Suddenly the old mother exclaimed: "Ah, my dear young lady, my heart tells me that some great misfortune is going to take place! O, Lord! if he were to be brought home some night with a cut from a knife — It chills my blood, it makes me lose my reason to think of it!"

In the great torment of pain caused by the mere supposition, she found courage enough to reveal her inmost thought.

"I have often suspected it," she said in a low voice, taking the young teacher's hand, without daring to look her in the face; "I have often thought that it was on account of this kind of sympathy; nor did I deceive myself——"

All of a sudden, joining her hands together, with an accent of ardent supplication, "Oh, my dear young lady," she murmured, looking her in the eyes; "if only, in the kindness of your heart, you would say a good word to him, just one good word."

And she interrupted herself again, as if struck dumb by the expression on the face of Signorina Varetti.

"What do you mean?" asked the teacher, blushing deeply. "What are you talking about? What kind of a part are you playing now?"

The old woman sobbed and burst into tears. "Ah, I know, it is foolish — but do forgive me — a poor mother who doesn't know what she is saying;" and she grasped Enrica's hand with such a dolorous and affectionate humility that the young teacher felt touched to the heart. Releasing her right hand, she placed it on the woman's

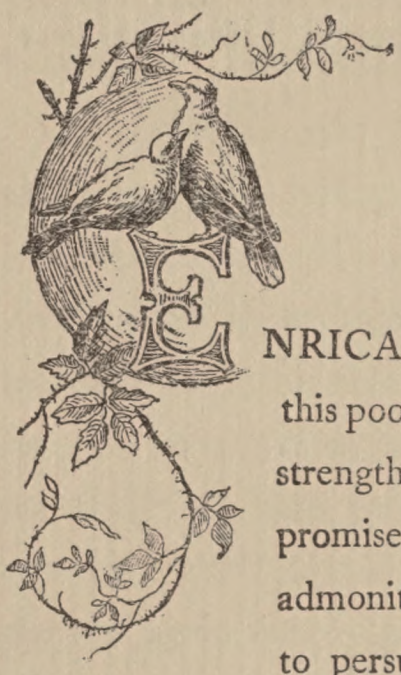
head caressingly, causing the kerchief to drop from it to her neck, and said: "Take heart, poor woman; you will see that nothing is going to happen. Besides, I will speak to him."

"May God bless you," replied the unfortunate creature, raising her face. "May God bless you. Perhaps one word will prevent his poor mother dying from despair; he has made me suffer so much that he would not take the risk; he would have too much compassion to make my last days so miserable! May God save his soul!" As she was leaving the room she was again seized by the same terrible presentiment.

"I am so afraid that they will murder him!" she exclaimed, starting to cry afresh. "Something foretells me that they are going to murder him. May the good Lord hold him in His care!"

She had already shut the door, when she returned to kiss the young lady's hand with deep emotion. Then she departed, hiding her face behind her closed fingers.

XX



ENRICA Varetti, out of pity for this poor old woman, decided to strengthen herself to keep her promise and give some loving admonition to her wicked son, to persuade him not to be so cruel to his mother, even if that was all she could succeed in inducing him to do. But she did not even know when or where to speak to him; for it did not occur to her to call him to one side, owing to the disposition which the other scholars had evinced when he came in or left the class-room. This uncertainty lasted through the

whole day. That evening the "window-jumper" came to school.

His face was more livid than ever, and the alteration in his appearance showed that he had not yet recovered from the effects of a prolonged spree. He was welcomed by a continued murmur, which he silenced by stopping in the middle of the room, and looking at the benches in his sinister way. Then he walked over to his seat, and resumed his usual posture, but with such a hard, stubborn-looking and surly countenance that it seemed as if he had resolved to do something desperate that very evening.

Pity for his mother, the fear that he was about entering some atrocious course of action, and the hope of preventing such a catastrophe, induced Enrica to look at him with what she thought was boldness. After having thought it over a little, her heart beating rapidly, she chose a minute when the whole class appeared busy

and oblivious of their teacher, and turned her gaze towards Muroni, at a time when he could not help meeting it, and she fixed upon him for some seconds a glance expressive of deep kindness, indulgence and supplication — a thing she had never been able to do before.

For a minute, Muroni remained motionless, in the attitude of one who hears for the first time the voice of an invisible being, who, he believes, is pronouncing his name. Then he looked around, and turned again to gaze at the teacher, whose eyes were no longer fixed upon him; and he pressed his hand against his forehead. And from that moment it was plain that there awoke within the man a new agitation, a new train of thought.

The boys soon commenced to be disorderly again, and to scorn the injunctions of their teacher, in order to offend him. For a little while, the "window-jumper" paid no atten-

tion to it; but all of a sudden, having heard young Maggia mutter a vile word about Signorina Varetti—which she did not, however, hear—he turned with the swiftness of a tiger and shouted: "Maggia, I'll cut your throat!" A number of voices replied: "One moment! Don't be in a hurry. We'll see about that!" And some one from the other side of the room bellowed: "I am here!"

It was Maggia's uncle, who had arisen, his deformed body quivering with rage, his face all aflame. Although he had no affection for the boy who annoyed him constantly with his wicked ways, when it came to a question of blood-spilling, he arose to defend his relative, without even knowing the reason of the threat, without reflecting or stopping to inquire, simply interfering because he had heard his name mentioned.

"I will stab you, too!" cried Muroni.

The teacher, with surprising energy, made him a sign to stop. "You fellows know who I am," cried the young man to the whole class, and he sat down again, his eyes burning like live coals.

The school mistress, regaining command of her voice, enjoined silence on her excited pupils. They all became quiet again, not out of respect for her, but on account of a presentiment that something serious was about to occur; this was too surely foreshadowed by the resolute looks of all, and by the entrance, into the lists, of Maggia's uncle, who was known for his strength and for his furious, bull-like temper.

Signorina Varetti remained in suspense until the end of the lesson, assigning tasks in a voice thin as a thread. They departed in silence.

The young teacher ran into the hallway, seeking the janitor everywhere in vain; then she

went to the street door, all in a tremble, expecting a bloodthirsty quarrel.

Indeed, she heard voices cry: "Make room! Make room!"—to clear space for the combatants. Then Muroni was heard: "Come on, I say!" Then the older Maggia shouted: "Here I am!" The poor girl had to lean against the wall, so as not to fall in a faint.

But instead of the sounds of blows and yells that she expected, she heard an unexpected whisper, like a cry of warning carried from mouth to mouth, and the stampeding of feet in the crowd, which melted away silently.

In the silence she heard the voice of Muroni, crying from afar: "Until to-morrow."

Many voices repeated: "Until to-morrow." And others, nearer and sterner, added in tones of admonition: "Go on home, boys! Go on!"

It was a squad of gendarmes clearing the road.

XXI

ENRICA VARETTI had never experienced such fear since her childhood, when she had witnessed the bloody quarrel between the miners, and the shock she had experienced then, had almost killed her. She had felt the breath of crime pass through the air. During the whole night she was troubled with cold chills, followed by a burning fever, which

added to her oppressing thoughts the most frightful images that had ever troubled her during the course of her life. She awoke utterly tired out, weighed down by dark presentiments, seeking diligently, and without finding it, any means of preventing the dread deed about to be committed.

She drew a breath of consolation on beholding Signora Mazzara at the threshold. The latter was so enthusiastic over her own plans that she forgot to inquire about the evening class and the "window-jumper"—the real reasons of her having come thither, despite the intense cold and the fog. She wanted Signora Baroffi to write an article on the bad food given to children at the "Asylums," where beans had become an intolerable abuse. She also wanted to institute a reform in the methods of teaching singing in the elementary schools, where, under the illusion that children should learn music,

they taught them to sing difficult choruses without inspiration and without life, sounding like funeral songs and putting both singers and listeners to sleep. She wanted to promote a subscription for a testimonial to a blind teacher of the "Institute d'Azeglio"—a beautiful young woman, an angel of grace and kindness. Finally, when she had unburdened herself, she questioned her young friend and listened attentively. Signorina Varetti told her minutely all that had happened and all that she feared.

But, alas! whether through Enrica's fault, or through the peculiar nature of the subject, the conversation ended abruptly and unfortunately.

After the Signora had heard everything, she proffered a bit of advice, which the young teacher could not help believing had been prepared beforehand; it popped out so quickly.

"My dear," said she, in the tones of an elder sister; "my advice is this: the matter

must end at any cost, and it depends upon you to bring it to a close. You must not allow a crime to be committed on your account. There is only one way to stop it. You must take advantage of your 'ascendency' over that man Muroni. Call him to one side, and resolutely command him to desist from any thought of revenge, to sacrifice his vanity, if need be, and to submit resignedly for your sake. In this way, nothing will happen and he will alter his ways. If you put forth sufficient authority he will obey. There is no other issue out of this awful tangle. You must do this for the sake of your conscience. That is my honest opinion."

"But what makes you think that he will obey me?" asked Enrica Varetti, not yet grasping the Signora's idea.

Signora Mazzara hesitated a moment. Then she replied frankly: "You are, after all, the only one who can make him obey."

"Ah! my dear friend," exclaimed the young teacher, rising to her feet, with a haughty smile, "in order to avoid a disaster, I will make almost any sacrifice, but I will not degrade myself."

The Signora felt deeply hurt, and her inborn love for the proletariat made the blood rush to her brow, as she realized, in a flash, that Signorina Varetti would have given the same reply if her own, the Signora's, brothers had been in question. Yet, restraining her anger, she replied with a forced smile: "Such are social prejudices."

"Social prejudices!" retorted the other excitedly. "No, indeed! but prejudices of dignity, of honor! I should blush at the sight of my father's picture, were I to forget such prejudices."

"Oh, well," exclaimed the Signoria, repressing a movement of anger, "for that matter,

men of all classes are alike, save that there is a shade of difference in the color of their sins and vices; the men of the upper ten drink better wine, go with outcast women who wear better clothes, and fight with swords instead of knives."

Enrica Varetti checked an outburst of indignation, but answered with a fair show of honest pride:

"You are not yourself when you speak thus. My father fought a duel once — would you on that account place him in the same category with rowdies who fight with knives in low saloons? Such a comparison would be simply infamous."

"Infamous!" retorted the Signora, her voice suffocated by anger. "Infamous! well, I can just tell you that I boast of my plebeian birth; that I am proud of my family, such as it is; that I despise the airs of the aristocrats, and that I don't want aristocrats for my friends."

Having said this, she passed tragically from the room, with tears in her eyes. Enrica ran after her, calling her by name, begging her to come back. The older teacher turned around and answered angrily: "I will come back at some other time; it wouldn't be advisable to-day," and she disappeared.

The young lady sank in a chair, thoroughly discouraged. Even her friend had abandoned her, on a day in which she had so much need of distraction and comfort.

Not wishing to remain alone, she went to seek the company of Signora Baroffi. She found her at table; her hair in a tangle, her round face as wrinkled as that of an old actress, bending over a dozen copy-books, in which she was transcribing the phrases and sentences of literary people, of journalists and of lecturers, which, after resting in her storehouse for a month, became her own property; and she

claimed them for her own so religiously that, if she heard them read elsewhere, she believed them stolen from her. Signorina Varetti informed her of the trials and tribulations she was undergoing.

"My dear child," replied her friend, with a heavy, emphatic voice; "you are too stubborn to admit that I am right. Speak to them, touch their hearts. Read the stirring passages of Thouar or of Lambruschini to them, and you will see them change, right before your eyes. Ah! if it were I." But, notwithstanding her friend's sadness, Signora Baroffi did not talk at length on this subject. She was very excited over the description of an impressive and dignified London meeting, where, in the main hall of the University, in the presence of the chancellor, the whole faculty, and a great crowd of students and guests, a young woman had been honored with the degree of doctor of sciences. This

had always been the supreme height of Signora Baroffi's ambition.

"Imagine, my dear," she exclaimed, with enthusiasm; "this beautiful young lady with the red and gold insignia of a doctor of sciences, in that place, before all those people, in the midst of all that applause, and the whole city of London talking about it! I would be willing to die an hour after it, if I were to enjoy such glory!"

Enrica Varetti left her friend to her dreams, and sadder than when she called upon her, betook herself to Signorina Latti's apartment. She found her busily writing, in front of a kind of shrine, filled with medicine vials and drug store boxes; tears were falling on her manuscript. She did not wish to be mysterious and had soon unfolded her tale of woe. For the last two days she had felt undeniable symptoms of approaching death, and had finally decided to write her last will and testament. Enrica

Varetti smiled for the first time that day. But if the testament was a subject of mild hilarity, the testatrix was truly worried and frightened; and her young friend felt that such company would benefit her but little. So she returned to her own room and began counting the time, quarter of an hour after quarter of an hour, by the strokes of the church tower clock.

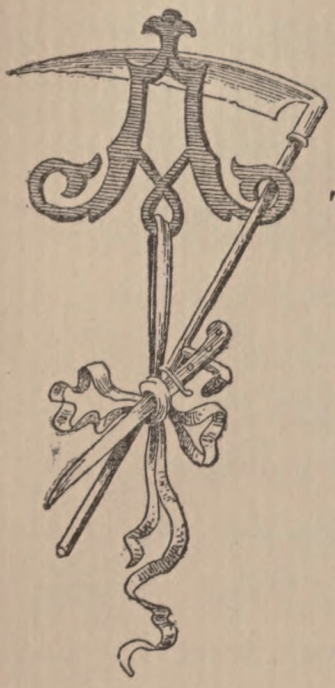
At four o'clock she aroused herself and walked over to Principal Garollo's rooms, to lay the state of affairs before him, and to find out if he did not think it advisable to warn the gendarmes that they should be in the vicinity of the school house during the evening session.

Signor Garollo was all alone, sipping a glass of wine, and a little excited, not so much from the wine as from some good financial news about the educational world. After listening to her, somewhat impatiently, he declared himself quite opposed to her opinion.

"If we," said he, "make a habit of calling the gendarmes to our aid, the pupils will start a perfect riot the very first time they are not there. And then it would injure the prestige of the school. One must not make an open display of mistrusting the common people." However, the principal did not belittle the gravity of the case. After five minutes of uncertainty, he took an heroic resolution: "This evening," spoke he, placing his index finger on his chest, "this evening I will put in my appearance."

The school mistress went away, somewhat comforted.

XXII



T THE approach of evening, her anxiety, her sadness and fear arose again. She was unable to keep away from the window, from whence she looked down on the deserted avenue, as if inquiring of it what would happen that night under its trees; and the heavy fog which covered everything, save the trees in the vicinity of the school house, that could be seen but dimly, seemed to augur evil. The ringing of the bells announced the hour; the strident noises from the factory machinery; the distant hammering upon the blacksmith's anvils; the red

lantern of the "Gallina," that twinkled in the distance like a blood-shot eye, all these things impressed her gloomily, almost threateningly, recalling to her mind the dreadful wall-posters advertising sensational plays, which had made such a profound impression on her mind in the days of her childhood.

She felt a desire to pray. She donned a hood only, and hastened across the lane to the church; there she knelt down beside a pillar. The church was dark, a single lamp in front of the main altar, threw a dim light. Scattered here and there, a few women were kneeling. One could hear the heavy step of the sacristan at the lower end. She prayed, remembering her mother, invoking the memory of her father to inspire her with courage; and it appeared to her that the prayer was granted. She thought for a little while of those mighty models of bravery and devotion found in religious and

secular history, and of whom she had so often spoken to her little pupils, with the ardor of one who feels capable of imitation; and she felt ashamed to think that the fortitude she would require was so small, compared with the heroism their lives had shown. After all, she had but to keep her post with dignity, she need fear no harm to her person; and, moreover, was not fear as base, as cowardly in a teacher as it was in a soldier? "Courage!" she said resolutely, arising to her feet; fortified now, almost impatient to face the battle, she started to leave the church.

Near the door, while in the act of lifting the heavy drapery, which made a sort of ante-chamber between the wall and the door, she beheld the figure of a man. She recognized Muroni, and she trembled at the thought of meeting him alone in this dark, unfrequented part of the church. But she recovered her self-possession,

realizing that he would not dare to attempt any act of violence there, in the sacred edifice. She moved forward.

"Teacher," said he, sadly, but firmly; "pray for me."

She wanted to respond, but her voice failed.

At that moment she felt her hand seized respectfully, as if by one who wishes merely to offer a friendly salutation. In the effort she made to release it, her fingers contracted and pressed his hand; but her mind was still clear enough to realize that the next movement of his was not premeditated, but had been brought about by a sort of boiling over of the young man's blood, excited by the pressure of her hand.

For, in the next second, she felt herself grasped by the waist, then by the arms, then the shoulders, and she felt the warm breath from

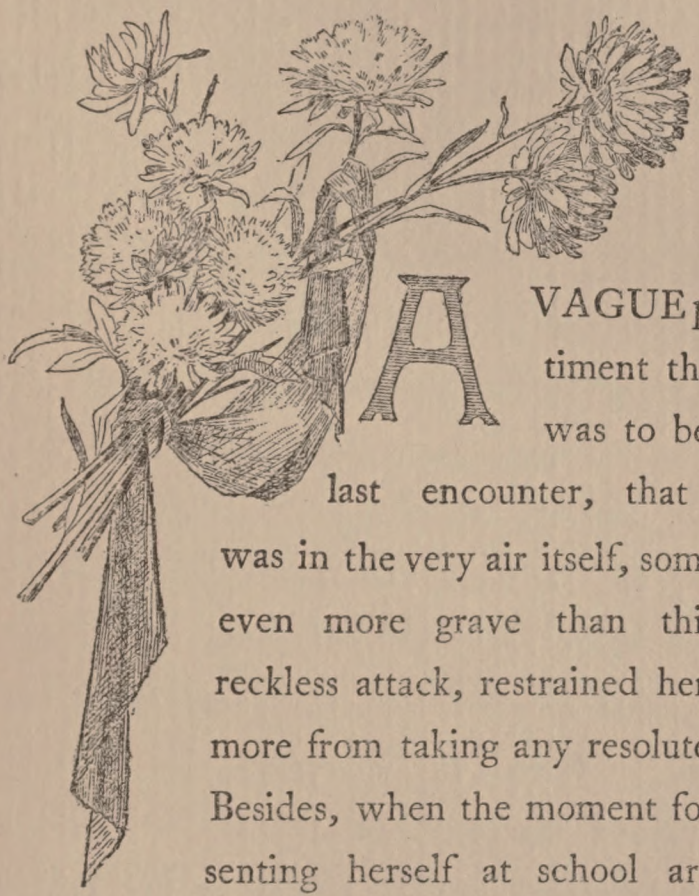
Muroni's mouth on her cheek. She resisted him with all her might, pushing against his chest with her hands; she twisted like a contortionist; she struggled; she tried to pull away from him. She threw herself on her knees, and heard his coarse voice whispering: "A kiss! a kiss! in the name of heaven, a kiss!"

The desperate struggle lasted some minutes, the air heavy with the smell of incense, quivering with the breath of prayer and choked sobs. The sound of an approaching step re-echoed through the church. He let her go and dashed away.

She had scarcely reached the lane, fixing her hood with convulsive hands, when she heard the voice of Muroni again. "Forgive me!" he cried; "I have been a villain, I know it, but I will never do it again, I swear it by my soul!"

She did not even turn around, but ran toward the school house, ascended to her room, and falling on her knees in front of the portrait of her father, she broke forth into violent sobs.

XXIII



A VAGUE presentiment that this was to be their last encounter, that there was in the very air itself, something even more grave than this last reckless attack, restrained her once more from taking any resolute step. Besides, when the moment for presenting herself at school arrived, she found herself armed with renewed courage, with more courage even than she had ever possessed before; perhaps it was the result of that

foreboding which told her that an end, no matter what it might be, must come to her troubles.

When she entered the corridor, just as the pupils were making their way into the school house, the janitor stopped her, and said, with an uncomfortable-looking countenance: "Be careful, Miss, for — that is, I have heard certain remarks; it will be a bad evening."

She walked into the room: the full class was there, not a member absent, despite the cold weather and the dense fog which covered the country like a heavy smoke. She smelled, stronger than ever, the odor of vile liquor, cheap, stale tobacco, and the grease from machinery. When she ascended the platform and turned towards the pupils, an unusual silence followed, and all looked at her with a peculiar expression of curiosity, and, in fact, the agitation she had undergone that day, the tears she had shed but a few hours ago, the

lassitude that had oppressed her for over a week, had beautified and refined her girlish, almost childish, face, which her black woolen dress made still purer and sweeter by contrast, in her tall, slender form. It was the languid grace of an invalid, which rendered her more beautiful than she had ever appeared to her class before. Turning a rapid glance about the room she saw that all her tormentors, including Muroni, were there.

She had scarcely seated herself when the door opened and Principal Garollo "presented himself." The teacher, who had despaired of his keeping his promise, breathed easier.

By the manner in which he entered the room, shaking his big head, darting fiery glances at the benches, one would have supposed that he intended to admonish the pupils most terribly. Alighting on the platform, it seemed for a few minutes as if he were stifled with indignation and

with the weight of the solemn words he was going to utter. Then he said with the most affable familiarity: "What is this I hear, my children, that there is ill-feeling among you? This displeases me — it ought not to be. Upon my word! if the workingmen don't agree among themselves, who in the world should? And it seems that you haven't been behaving very well. I can't understand that. In my own class, your friends are as good as in a church." (At that very moment one could hear the uproar in his room upstairs.) "You ought to behave still better out of respect for this young lady who is teaching you. Now be good after this and don't trouble us any more — unless you want to have trouble yourselves. And, remember," he concluded with an expressive look; "that it is only by means of concord and education that the laboring classes can achieve their destiny."

After hurling this phrase, which no one understood, he withdrew from the room in haste. Some of the boys burst out laughing; the men remained quiet and indifferent, while the teacher, somewhat disillusionized, resumed the lesson.

To her surprise, the class remained unusually quiet for a while, and at first she rejoiced at it. But, after a few minutes, this unusual good behavior began to worry her. The expectation of something serious coming was plainly written on many countenances; they were evidently waiting for something unavoidable that had been pre-arranged among a number of pupils. Muroni, more haggard than ever, exchanged scrutinizing glances with the others. Even little Maggia's uncle, always so persistently attentive to his lessons, seemed absent-minded and uneasy. Alas, Enrica's presentiments had not deceived her!

What troubled her most was the brazen face of little Maggia, on which an air of nonchalance

mingled with the bold grin of a conscienceless, heartless wretch, who feels that he is being aided and encouraged to commit an infamous deed, and who enjoys in advance his evil, treacherous notoriety. For the first time, he avoided her gaze, lowering his diabolical eyes whenever she looked at him, hiding his malevolent smile behind his dirty hand, with which he teased the down on his upper lip. It flashed through Signorina Varetti's mind that the boys had selected him to insult her, in order to provoke the "window-jumper." None the less, a greater part of the session was passed without disturbance. The ringleaders had arranged, perhaps, to strike the blow at the close of the evening, so that the inevitable conflict might take place directly after the provocation. Nothing noteworthy did occur, however, save a brief literary discussion between the teacher and Lamagno, *à propos* of a word that he had used in his composition.

He had written: "There entered at this minute another '*exhausted.*'" Enrica Varetti, ignorant of socialistic terms, held that the participial form used there as a substantive, to express the idea of "a salaried workingman overtasked by his master," was not at all intelligible. She objected to the explanation that Lamagno gave her on purely grammatical grounds; he accepted her correction with a smile that was both respectful and condescending.

A quarter of an hour before school closing time, she noticed that various inciting signs were made to little Maggia; fearful of the result of these signals, and with the intention of preventing what was meant to follow them, she walked between the benches courageously, and advanced to the boy's seat with a kindly demeanor, as if she wished to look at his copy-book. She thought that such a courteous act might, perchance, divert him from his purpose.

She did succeed, in fact, in preventing him from executing one base purpose, the throwing of some vile thing on her desk. But something still worse happened.

While she stood, bending over the bench, her head almost touching his, he put his arm around her waist.

A loud roar of laughter came from the benches.

She released herself, with a slight cry. Muroni was already standing on his bench, about to throw himself on the wretch.

"Muroni!" she cried, with all her might, "keep your seat!"

He sat down, gnawing his fist. She ordered little Maggia to leave the school. He gathered his books together and went out, his shoulders shaking as with subdued laughter, but he turned at the door to make a face at Muroni, who made a sign with his hand: "Wait!"

Signorina Varetti returned to her place, the blood almost deserting her veins, and trembling violently, not so much on account of the insult as for the terrible results she apprehended.

A profound silence followed, that terrified her still more. Every face grew serious. Muroni's features fairly blazed with hatred and with so powerful a resolve written on them, that it was quite evident that nothing on earth could move him from it. The rest of the lesson passed like a frightful dream. Enrica could hear in the street the defiant whistle of little Maggia, who had evidently remained in the vicinity of the school house. She wanted to send the janitor for the gendarmes, she wanted to summon the principal, she wanted to order Muroni to stay in the class after the others; but she could do none of these things; her organic disease, this terrible weakness of the spine, that robbed her, at times, of all will power, of movement,

even of voice, seized her now from head to foot, paralyzed her, stupefied her, thrilled her with horror and agony.

The ringing of the bell, which foretold the close of the session, had the effect upon her of a cyclone announcing the arrival of death. She fell back in her chair and rested her head on her hand.

Muroni was the first one to leave, or rather, to disappear, crossing the room like a flash of lightning. The others withdrew in great disorder; some to defend little Maggia, others to watch the fight, the more prudent ones to absent themselves from the scene of the affray. Among the latter she saw Perotti and his son, gliding away like shadows, and she gathered strength and courage enough to call: "Perotti," and to beg him to interfere in the fight; but he ran away without replying, pulling his frightened child after him.

Just at that moment, she heard sharp cries from the avenue, and soon thereafter the janitor, pale and trembling, entered the room, perhaps to seek refuge.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"The 'window-jumper' has smashed little Maggia's face," he replied, running away to avoid being sent outside.

Meanwhile there could be heard on the avenue a confusion of shouts and hurried steps. Enrica left the room, leaning against the wall, and she walked up to her own suite, where she could hear the frightened voices of Signora Baroffi and Signorina Latti, from the neighboring apartments. The shouts and steps from the outside sounded farther and farther away. Taking courage, she ran to open the window, and looked out. The heavy fog hid everything. She saw on the ground, in front of the school house, by the light of the lamp, some hats and

a club. Further down there was a dense, mysterious darkness, from whence arose the muffled groans — which seemed to come now from anear, now from afar — of people chasing one another. "Here he is! There he goes! Down on him! Scoundrel! Go ahead! Stab him!" Three or four shadows passed before the school and disappeared behind the church. Enrica heard several sharp, stunning blows, like the fall of a club on a skull; then piercing, lamenting, wild groans, furious as the roar of a wounded beast: "Murderers!" Then breathless voices: "Run! Get away!" and she saw other shadows pass through the fog, under her window; a moment afterward she watched still other shadows, in whom she thought she recognized gendarmes. Then everything vanished from sight, and a dense silence followed. She withdrew from the window, without stopping to close it, and, pressing her hand on her heart,

McMatters

stumbled over to her bed and dropped on it, exhausted.

A few minutes later, she heard Signora Baroffi making her way into the room. The older lady was excited and in a dramatic manner, she addressed a number of questions, to which Enrica did not reply. Then her friend helped her to arise, and they walked to the other window and, opening it, looked down on the court, where a few sounds could be heard. They could distinguish the voice of Mr. Garollo exhorting the janitor to get information on the quarrel, assuring him that all was now over. But the janitor refused, replying: "That may all be true enough, but they can pick me up for a witness." Then the principal grew indignant and called the weak, cowardly fellow all sorts of names.

They drew back from the window. On the avenue, through the fog, one could see a

coming and going of lights, the murmuring of many people. Suddenly, the sobs and moans of a heart-broken woman burst forth. Enrica Varetti recognized the voice, and sank in the arms of her friend who carried her to the bed.

Once more silence reigned supreme.

Signora Baroffi soon resumed her questioning:

"Have they wounded or killed anybody? Did anything happen in the class? How did the quarrel commence? What was the matter, anyway?"

"I know nothing," replied Enrica, shivering. "I don't know; I can't speak; I can't say anything."

Her friend returned to the window and exclaimed: "Good Lord! they have sent for the priest!"

The poor young teacher began to cry.

At that moment, some one knocked at the door. It was the principal and his wife; they

had come to seek and to give information. Signora Baroffi cautioned them to be quiet, pointing to her friend on the bed. But despite her warning, the principal said in his deep tone of voice: "Many are hurt; the 'window-jumper' is seriously wounded!"

Hearing Enrica Varetti weep, they left the room to visit Signorina Latti, who had chosen this occasion to betake herself to bed, saying that her last hour on earth had come.

Enrica and her friend had remained silent for a little while, when three vigorous blows, struck at the street entrance, aroused them. They heard the voice of the janitor asking who was there, and refusing to open the door before he found out the name of the visitor.

"Quick!" cried the impatient voice of a woman, "I have a message from the priest!"

Enrica Varetti instinctively felt that the message was for her, and she guessed its import.

Urged by one of those sudden impulses which arise only in good and noble souls at the call of duty, her weakness passed away at once, likewise her fear and disgust; and she cried impetuously: "I am going!" and grasping her hood, she ran down the stairs; her friend following with difficulty.

It was just what she had suspected. This woman had been sent by the priest and Muroni's mother to entreat Signorina Varetti to go to the bedside of the dying man.

"I am ready," said the young lady with perfect simplicity, and leaving the janitor astounded at her courage, without even answering Signora Baroffi, who was recommending the use of fine words, during this momentous interview, she rushed away with the old woman.

XXIV

ENRICA walked so quickly that the woman, who held a lantern in her hand, could hardly keep up with her. They moved on without speaking. In the fog, they passed several groups of curious people, who were walking up and down the avenue, looking at the ground, trying to discover traces of blood, while they were commenting on the quarrel. There was a great crowd in front of the "Gallina," and, turning to the right, they beheld a number of people standing at the open doorway. In front of the

butcher shop, they met two gendarmes who were dragging after them a handcuffed man, followed by many excited people shouting at the top of their voices. Signorina Varetti turned away. The fog prevented her from recognizing the man under arrest.

"Ah, they caught another one! The murderers, the cowards, ten against one!" exclaimed the woman.

Muroni's home was next to the cigar store. Enrica recognized several persons in the crowd that stood in front of it. They at once opened up a way for her to reach the door. As she moved through them to the house, she heard a bit of conversation that made her shudder. "The point of the knife," said one, "has touched the marrow of his spine." "Then there is nothing more to be done," said another.

On the stairway, she could hear, from the first floor, the sobbing of an old woman,

Muroni's mother, and she felt her courage forsaking her; but she mastered herself and moved on. She saw an open door, the light of a low-burning lamp, and she entered straightway.

The old mother, frantic with grief, and twisting her hands convulsively, ran to meet her.

"He is dying! Oh do try and convert him! He has thrown away the crucifix! He is dying like a heathen! Save his soul, for the love of Christ, for the love of your dead parents; save his soul, if he can recognize you yet!"

The room was small, dingy, low, barely furnished. Stretched on a trundle bed lay the wounded man, pale, haggard; the bony finger of death clutching his face; his hair matted; his shirt stained with blood; struggling madly; swearing; gnashing his teeth; pushing back the priest who held out the crucifix to him; beating the air with his fists; panting; stricken by a paralysis that almost prevented his breathing.

In one corner of the room stood the big blonde doctor, calmly washing his hands in a basin. The room was in disorder, covered with soiled clothes and bloody blankets. The little priest, with an air of resignation, aweary of his many attempts to make Muroni kiss the crucifix, was wiping from that sacred emblem the dust, which had fallen on it, when the dying man dashed it against the wall with an angry fling of his hand.

The young teacher approached the bed boldly. On seeing her, the dying man became quiet at once, fastening his eyes upon her — those eyes already dim, as if veiled by a thin, glassy film. He lay gazing at her, with an expression of profound amazement.

His mother stood before the bed sobbing: "My child, look up! It is the teacher! Don't you recognize her?"

The priest, availing himself of an opportune moment, held the crucifix over Muroni's face; but he pushed it away again, angrily, not moving his gaze from Enrica.

Suddenly a smile illumined his features, and breathing with difficulty, stretching out his trembling hands, he murmured some confused words, in a choking voice. "Good God!" exclaimed the mother, clasping her hands, "he has said '*Good God!*'"

But he had not said it. Enrica alone had understood his words; they were the same as she had heard him say before, but in such a different voice: "Give me a kiss."

Moved by an infinite tenderness for this criminal who had given his life for her, she bent over the bed and kissed him, grasping one of his hands in her left, laying her right on his forehead.

When she raised her head, a change had come over him. His countenance was now radiant with an expression of peace and gratitude. Slowly, without taking his hand away or ceasing to look at her, he reached out his other hand toward the priest, and taking the crucifix, carried it to his lips, kissed it and pressed it to his bosom.

The old mother uttered a cry of intense gratitude, fell upon her knees, and buried her head in Enrica's skirts.

But the dying man was still holding the young girl's hand in his, and keeping his eyes fixed upon her. And thus he breathed his last.

THE END.

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